

The Story of SAIUNKOKU

7

Art by
Kairi Yura
Story by
Sai Yukino





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Volume 7

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Story Thus Far

After passing the Imperial Civil Exam with high marks, Shurei Hong becomes the country of Salunkoku's first female civil servant (currently in training). Yet, almost in exchange for her new position, Shurei finds that the townspeople she grew up with have grown distant, and even her "big sister" Kocho is pulling away. At court she faces prejudice from the officials and escalating bullying from her trainer, Official Ro. Even so, Shurei perseveres determinedly through her trials with the encouragement and support of her fellow inductee civil servants, Elgetsu and Hakumel. However...



Ryuki Shi

The young emperor of Salunkoku. He has been pining ceaselessly for Shurei since her departure from the Inner Court.



Koyu Ri

A civil servant renowned throughout the court as a genius, currently stuck in a frivolous position (perhaps?) serving Ryuki. He has a hopelessly bad sense of direction.



Shurei Hong

A young noblewoman of the prestigious but impoverished Hong Clan. Having passed the Imperial Civil Exam, she is now the country's first female civil servant.



Shuei Ran

A military officer. He is a general of the Yulin Guard, a squad of soldiers charged with protecting the emperor. He is inseparable from Koyu (much to his friend's ire).



Seiran Shi

After being taken in by Shurei's father, Shoka, Seiran has served the Hong household as its faithful retainer ever since. He is actually Ryuki's older brother.

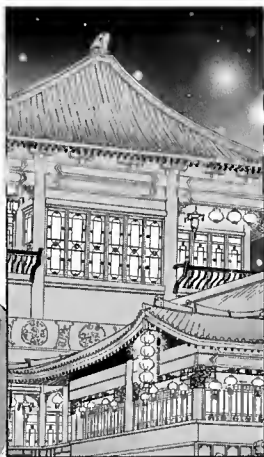


Shoka Hong

The eldest son of the Hong clan and Shurei's father. He holds a leisurely post as the Imperial Archivist, but there is a darker side to this ex-assassin as well.

Chapter 28







K
R
A
S
H

AFTER I
ALREADY
SENT
WORD
THAT WE'D
FOUND IT!

IF THEY
LEARN I DON'T
HAVE IT, MY
HARD-WON
PROMOTION
AND REWARD
PURSE WILL
DISSOLVE
LIKE WATER
VAPOR!

...WON'T
YOU CALM
YOURSELF?

MY
HONORED
LORD...



BY
WHOME?!
CAN'T YOU
GET IT
BACK?!



M-MASTER! WE
TRULY BEG YOUR
PARDON, BUT IT
HAPPENED SO
FAST! WE HAD
IT ONE MOMENT,
AND THEN IT WAS
TAKEN!

W
H
Y
M
P

THOSE
BRAINLESS
DOLTS...
BRINGING
SUCH NEWS
TO ME HERE
AFTER
I'VE PAID
HANDSOMELY
FOR A NIGHT
OF RARE
DELIGHTS!

AH...
OF
COURSE.



SO THAT
KID HAS
THE
BOX?



WE KNOW
WHERE
THE
THIEF IS,
MASTER!

W-WELL...

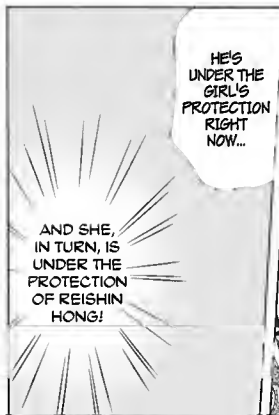
WHAT DID
YOU SAY!

HE'S WITH
THAT FEMALE
CIVIL
SERVANT
WHO'S THE
TALK OF THE
TOWN RIGHT
NOW!



THAT'S RIGHT!
AND WE SAW HIM
AGAIN THE NEXT
DAY WALKING
AROUND WITH
THAT FEMALE
CIVIL SERVANT.

HE GRABBED
THE BOX
AFTER IT
FELL OUT OF
OUR HANDS
AND RAN OFF.



HE'S
UNDER THE
GIRL'S
PROTECTION
RIGHT
NOW...

AND SHE,
IN TURN, IS
UNDER THE
PROTECTION
OF REISHIN
HONG!



...WELL,
NEVER MIND
THAT. IF
THAT KID
HAS IT, IT'LL
BE SIMPLE
ENOUGH. I
HAVE HIM
IN MY
GRASP...

BUT...



WHY DIDN'T
YOU SAY
SO IN THE
FIRST
PLACE!



IF I CAN
RETRIEVE THE
RING, I CAN
ALWAYS HAVE A
GOOD REPLICA
MADE AND PASS
IT OFF AS THE
REAL ONE.

I-I
SEE...



ONE CLUMSY
MOVE AND
HE'LL STRIKE
BACK LIKE A
POISONOUS
SNAKE.

HISS



GRIP

THAT
WRETCHED
GIRL....!



MMBL

UNTIL THE
REPLICA IS
FINISHED, MAKE
SURE NOT A
WORD OF THIS
LEAKS OUT.

MMBL

I'LL HAVE TO
KEEP AN EYE
ON THOSE
BRATS AS
WELL.

MMBL



KOCHO, I HAVE
PRESSING
BUSINESS!
FORGIVE ME,
BUT OUR NIGHT
TOGETHER MUST
WAIT.

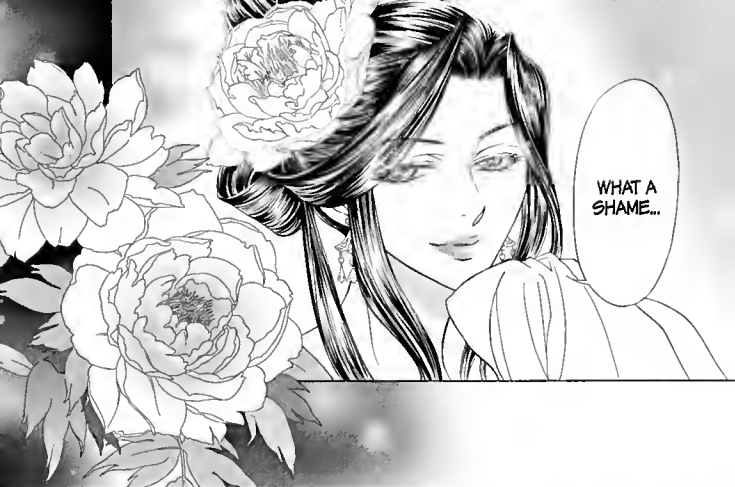
MY
LORD?

TIME IS
OF THE
ESSENCE!

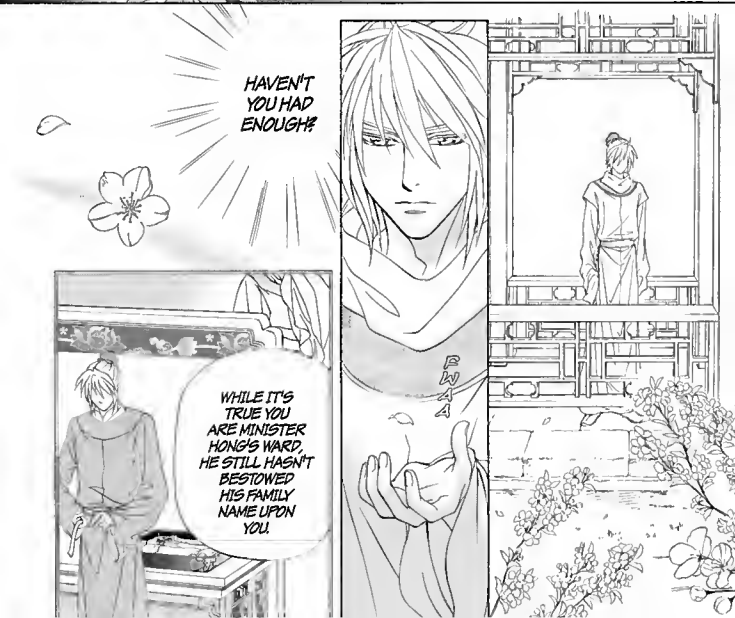
TMP

TMP

VUP



WHAT A
SHAME...



HAVEN'T
YOU HAD
ENOUGH?

WHILE IT'S
TRUE YOU
ARE MINISTER
HONG'S WARD,
HE STILL HASN'T
BESTOWED
HIS FAMILY
NAME UPON
YOU.

FWAA



JUST AS HE
TOOK YOU IN
ON A CALLOUS
WHIM, HE CAN
CAST YOU OUT
AGAIN JUST AS
EASILY WITHOUT
A SINGLE COIN IN
YOUR PURSE.

HE IS
A COLD-
HEARTED,
CAPRICIOUS
MAN.

IT LIKELY
MEANS HE HAS
NO INTENTION
OF EVER
ACCEPTING
YOU INTO THE
HONG CLAN.



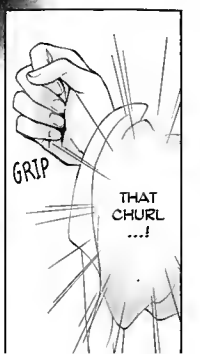
WHEN YOU
DO FINALLY
CLAIM YOUR
INDEPENDENCE,
I WILL LEND YOU
ANY AID IN MY
POWER, HUMBLE
AS IT IS.

IT PAINS
ME TO
SEE YOUR
TALENTS
WASTED
HERE.

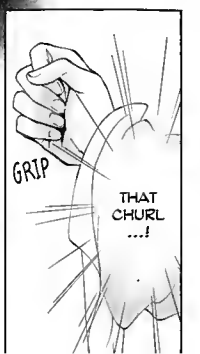


ISN'T IT
TIME YOU
BEGAN
SEEKING
YOUR OWN
ROAD TO
WALK?

YOU HAVE
MORE THAN
REPAID ANY
DEBT OF
GRATITUDE
YOU OWED
HIM.



MY
ABSENCE
WOULDN'T
MAKE A
DIFFERENCE
TO HIM...



I KNOW
THAT
WHETHER
I'M HERE
OR NOT
WOULDN'T
BOTHR
HIM IN THE
LEAST...

I
UNDER-
STAND IT
WELL.

GRIP

THAT
CHURL
...!



KOYU.
WHAT ARE
YOU DOING
LOITERING
IN SUCH A
PLACE?



BUT
EVEN
SO,
I...



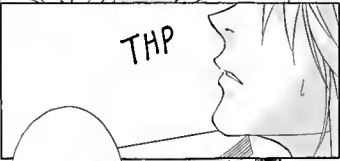
I KNOW THAT
I'M NOT A
PRECIOUS,
IRREPLACEABLE
PRESENCE IN
HIS LIFE THE
WAY MASTER
SHOKA AND
SHUREI ARE.



I'VE TOLD
YOU TIME AND
AGAIN THAT
IF YOU LOSE
YOUR WAY,
YOU SHOULD
IMMEDIATELY
ASK SOME-
ONE FOR
DIRECTIONS.



MY LORD
REISHIN!



THP



YOU'RE THE
ONE WHO
SEEMS
TROUBLED,
KOYU.



I WAS JUST
ADMIRING
THE PLUM
BLOSSOMS.

AND YOU, MY
LORD, WHAT
HAPPENED
TO BRING YOU
HERE?



IT'S...
NOTHING...



ALL
RIGHT
THEN.



FROM
THE MAIN
HOUSE?

AH. IT SEEMS
A MESSENGER
WAS
DISPATCHED
TO KIYO FROM
THE HONG MAIN
HOUSE.



GRRR

GRRR

I DOUBT IT WILL
COME TO THIS, BUT
IF THE MESSENGER
ARRIVES AT YOUR
HOUSE, I WANT YOU
TO SEND HIM PACKING
IMMEDIATELY. I
DON'T CARE TO HEAR
WHATEVER NEWS
THEY'RE SENDING.

Since leaving
home to
follow
Shoka to Shi
Province,
Reishin has
rarely set foot
back in Hong
Province.

The main
house,
located
in Hong
Province, is
the ancestral
home of
the Hong
Clan—
whom
Reishin
hates.



AH...
I...

WHAT?

LORD
REISHIN!



NOW COME
ALONG.
WE'LL
BE LATE
FOR THE
MORNING
SESSION.



WHAT
KIND OF A
RUBBISH
QUESTION
WAS
THAT?!

I'M
SUCH
AN
IDIOT!

YOU
WANT TO
BECOME
A DIM SUM
MASTER?

THOUGH I
SUPPOSE IN
YOUR CASE,
SIMPLY FINDING
YOUR WAY TO
THE "FARTHEST
REACHES OF THE
EMPIRE" OUGHT
TO TAKE YOU HALF
A LIFETIME.

PLEASE
LEAVE
THAT OUT
OF IT...



IF I WERE TO TELL
YOU I WANTED TO
LEAVE YOUR SIDE AND
TRAVEL OFF TO THE
FARTHEST REACHES
OF THE EMPIRE TO
STUDY THE ART OF
MAKING DIM SUM—
WHAT WOULD YOU SAY
TO THAT?!



IT'S
YOUR
LIFE,
AFTER
ALL. WHY
ASK ME?

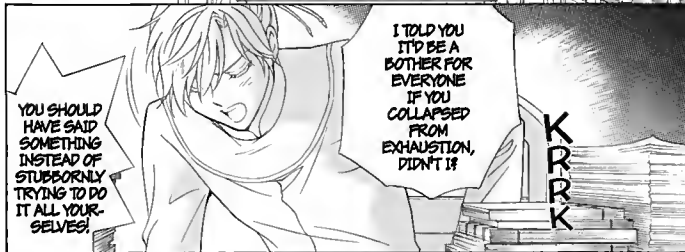
IF YOU
WISH
TO GO,
THEN YOU
SHOULD
SIMPLY
GO.





BUT
THIS IS
CLEARLY
FAR
BEYOND
YOUR FAIR
SHARE!

YOU MEAN THE
TWO OF YOU
HAVE BEEN
DOING THIS
MUCH WORK
EVERY DAY?!



YOU SHOULD
HAVE SAID
SOMETHING
INSTEAD OF
STUBBORNLY
TRYING TO DO
IT ALL YOUR-
SELVES!

I TOLD YOU
IT'D BE A
BOTHER FOR
EVERYONE
IF YOU
COLLAPSED
FROM
EXHAUSTION,
DIDN'T I?

K
R
R
K



YOU'RE
THE JOGEN
AND THE
TANKA! YOU
SHOULD
PROTEST!

LETTING
SHAMELESS
LOWLIFES ORDER
YOU ABOUT AND
PUSH EXTRA
WORK ON YOU...

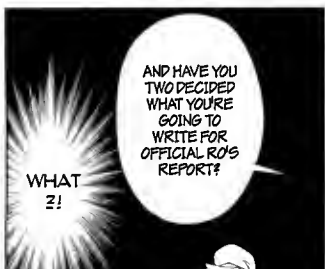


WAIT,
HAKUMEI-
WHAT ARE
YOU DOING?!

OH BE QUIET!
I'M GOING TO
HELP YOU SO
THAT YOU CAN
FINISH EARLY
TONIGHT
AND GET
YOURSELVES
SOME PROPER
REST.
UNDERSTOOD?

HAKUMEI?!

*Jogen and Tanka are the first and third top scorers on the Imperial Civil Exam. Second place is called Bogen.





SHUREI
HONG
REPORTING
IN! HERE
ARE YOUR
DOCUMENTS!

TUMP
TUMP



PARDON
THE
INTRUSION!



AH...

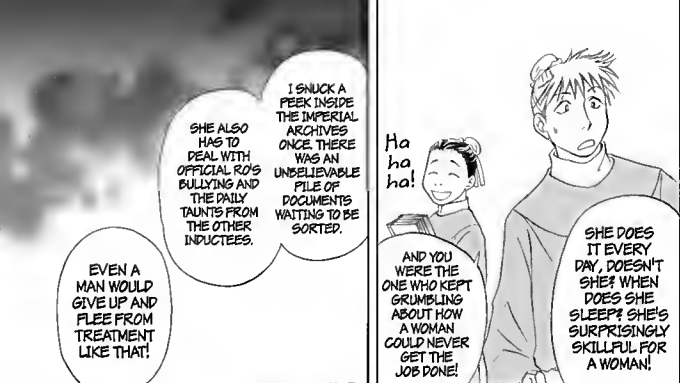
BOW



SHE'S
ON TIME
AGAIN
TODAY.

YEAH.

CHAK



SHE ALSO HAS TO DEAL WITH OFFICIAL RO'S BULLYING AND THE DAILY TAUNTS FROM THE OTHER INDUCTEES.

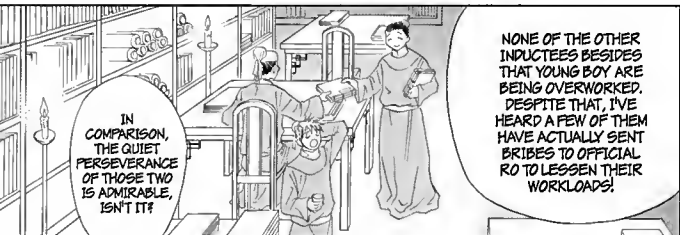
I SNUCK A PEEK INSIDE THE IMPERIAL ARCHIVES ONCE. THERE WAS AN UNBELIEVABLE FILE OF DOCUMENTS WAITING TO BE SORTED.

EVEN A MAN WOULD GIVE UP AND FLEE FROM TREATMENT LIKE THAT!

Ha ha ha!

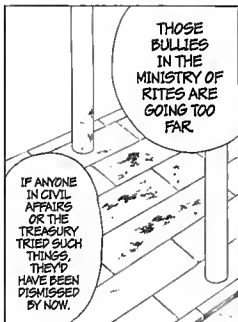
AND YOU WERE THE ONE WHO KEPT GRUMBLING ABOUT HOW A WOMAN COULD NEVER GET THE JOB DONE!

SHE DOES IT EVERY DAY, DOESN'T SHE? WHEN DOES SHE SLEEP? SHE'S SURPRISINGLY SKILLFUL FOR A WOMAN!



IN COMPARISON, THE QUIET PERSEVERANCE OF THOSE TWO IS ADMIRABLE, ISN'T IT?

NONE OF THE OTHER INDUCTEES BESIDES THAT YOUNG BOY ARE BEING OVERWORKED. DESPITE THAT, I'VE HEARD A FEW OF THEM HAVE ACTUALLY SENT BRIBES TO OFFICIAL RO TO LESSEN THEIR WORKLOADS!



THOSE BULLIES IN THE MINISTRY OF RITES ARE GOING TOO FAR

IF ANYONE IN CIVIL AFFAIRS OR THE TREASURY TRIED SUCH THINGS, THEY'D HAVE BEEN DISMISSED BY NOW.

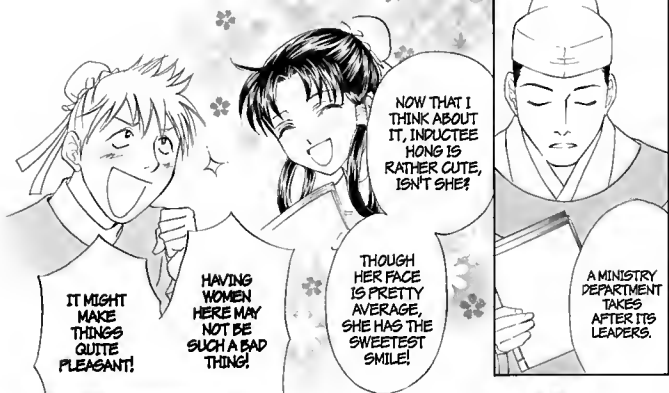


Yep! Yep!



WELL, THEY CERTAINLY AREN'T THE JOGEN AND TANKA FOR NOTHING. THEIR WORK IS ALWAYS PROMPT AND FLAWLESS!

THEY'VE BEEN QUITE A HELP TO US.



IT MIGHT
MAKE
THINGS
QUITE
PLEASANT!

HAVING
WOMEN
HERE MAY
NOT BE
SUCH A BAD
THING!

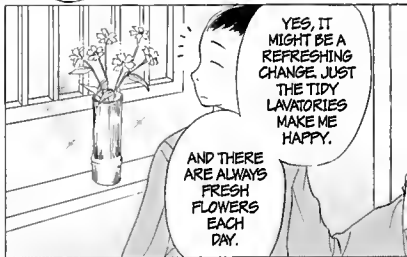
NOW THAT I
THINK ABOUT
IT, INDUCTEE
HONG IS
RATHER CUTE,
ISN'T SHE?

THOUGH
HER FACE
IS PRETTY
AVERAGE,
SHE HAS THE
SWEETEST
SMILE!

A MINISTRY
DEPARTMENT
TAKES
AFTER ITS
LEADERS.



AND THE WAY
THE DOCUMENTS
COME TO US
EVERY MORNING
ARRANGED
SO THAT
EVERYTHING IS
EASY TO FIND.



YES, IT
MIGHT BE A
REFRESHING
CHANGE. JUST
THE TIDY
LAVATORIES
MAKE ME
HAPPY.

AND THERE
ARE ALWAYS
FRESH
FLOWERS
EACH
DAY.



BLUSH

HA! YOU
CAN'T
COMPETE
WITH A
JOGEN!



MY FIRST
IMPRESSION
WAS THAT HE
WAS ALOOF
AND THOUGHT
HIMSELF
BETTER THAN
US, BUT NOW I
SEE HE'S
JUST SHY.

THAT LITTLE ONE
TOO NEVER SEEMS
TO BOAST ABOUT
PASSING THE EXAM
AS JOGEN. HE'S
ALWAYS HUMBLE,
POLITE AND
RESPECTFUL TO
EVERYONE.

HE IS
SUCH
A NICE
BOY.

HE'LL
PROBABLY
SURPASS US
ALL PRETTY
SOON, BUT I
GUESS I DON'T
MIND.

...AND
ABOUT
HAVING
FEMALE
CIVIL
SERVANTS
TOO.

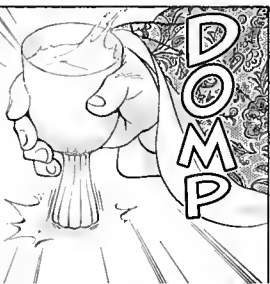
I'VE GOT
A PRETTY
GOOD
FEELING
ABOUT
OUR TOP
SCORERS
THIS YEAR..



OH
MY.



FEMALE CIVIL
SERVANTS,
BAH!
RIDICULOUS!
THE WORLD IS
COMING TO AN
END!





YOU KNOW
I COULDN'T
HAVE A
SINGLE
COMPLAINT
ABOUT A
WOMAN LIKE
YOU.



OH
KOCHO...!

MY
HONORED
LORD, DO
YOU HATE
WOMEN
SO?



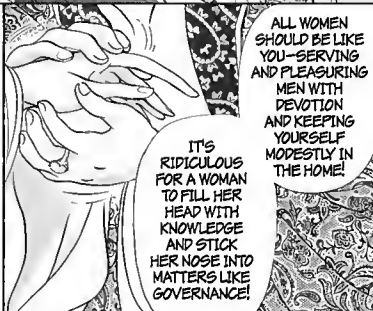
HOW YOU
FLATTER
ME.

AHH,
KOCHO. HOW
BEAUTIFUL
YOU ARE!

A MAN
WOULD
GLADLY PAY
A HUNDRED
GOLD RYO A
NIGHT FOR
YOU!



MY,
HOW
SCARY.



ALL WOMEN
SHOULD BE LIKE
YOU—SERVING
AND PLEASURING
MEN WITH
DEVOTION
AND KEEPING
YOURSELF
MODESTLY IN
THE HOME!

IT'S
RIDICULOUS
FOR A WOMAN
TO FILL HER
HEAD WITH
KNOWLEDGE
AND STICK
HER NOSE INTO
MATTERS LIKE
GOVERNANCE!



WHAT A
SHAME IT
WAS TO
LOSE THAT
MAGNIFICENT
RING!

THAT ONE
STILL
HASN'T
BEEN
FOUND!



IS THAT THE
JEWELRY
BOX YOUR
MEN SAID
THEY LOST
THE OTHER
NIGHT, MY
LORD?



I HAD A
FEW OF
THEM MADE
QUICKLY
IN CASE
THE REAL
ONE NEVER
TURNS UP.

HERE, KOCHO,
LOOK AT THE
WORKMANSHIP
ON THIS
REPLICA.

THIS
IS THE
BEST.

YOU SEEM
QUITE
ATTACHED
TO IT.



AH, HOW
LOVELY.

I'LL BE ABLE TO
BUY YOU OUT OF
THIS LIFE ONCE
AND FOR ALL.
YOU'LL LIVE LIKE
A QUEEN IN MY
HOUSE. YOU'LL
HAVE MORE
LUXURY THAN
THE EMPEROR
HIMSELF!

IF I CAN
GET THEM TO BELIEVE
THIS IS THE
REAL ONE,
I'LL RECEIVE
A GRAND
PROMOTION AND
BE HANDSOMELY
REWARDED
WITH GOLD!



IT'S THE
CHICKEN
THAT LAYS
GOLDEN
EGGS.

BECAUSE
THIS IS THEIR
COVENANT
WITH THE
SEVEN GREAT
CLANS.



KOCHO,
I MAY
HAVE ONE
SMALL
TASK I'LL
NEED YOU
TO DO FOR
ME.



IT WOULD BE
A FINE JEST
INDEED IF
THAT LITTLE
GIRL WOUND UP
BEING THE KEY
TO REISHIN
HONG'S
UNDOING!

YES... IF ALL
GOES WELL,
IT MAY EVEN
LEAD TO THE
REMOVAL OF
THAT IRRITATING
FEMALE CIVIL
SERVANT FROM
THE COURT.



THE RING
OF LORD
ADVISOR
SA?



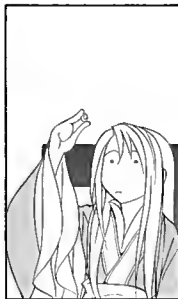
ANYTHING
YOUR
LORDSHIP
WISHES.



IT SEEMS
INCOMPLETE
SOMEHOW. IT
IS NOT THE
RING WE ARE
FAMILIAR
WITH.



...



WE THOUGHT AS
MUCH IT IS LIKELY
ONE OF SEVERAL
REPLICAS
CREATED BY OUR
THIEF IN CASE
HE COULDN'T
RECOVER THE
REAL ONE.

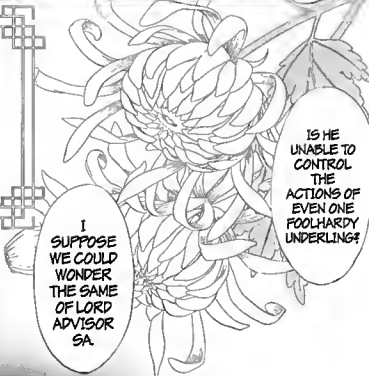


WE BELIEVE
ONE OF
HIS MORE
ENTERPRISING
UNDERLINGS
SNUCK IT AWAY
TO SELL ON
THE SIDE FOR
A PROFIT.



Last seen one
year prior on
the hand of
Lord Advisor
Sa, the ring
indicated
he was the
rightful Head
of the Sa
Clan.

But the
ring had
vanished
by the time
his corpse
was found.



I
SUPPOSE
WE COULD
WONDER
THE SAME
OF LORD
ADVISOR
SA.

IS HE
UNABLE TO
CONTROL
THE
ACTIONS OF
EVEN ONE
FOOLHARDY
UNDERLING?



BUT CAN WE
BE CERTAIN
THE RING
THAT HAS
APPARENTLY
RESURFACED
IS GENUINE?

DESPITE HOW
FRANTICALLY BOTH
WE AND THE SA
CLAN HAVE BEEN
SEARCHING FOR
IT THROUGHOUT
THIS YEAR, WHY
HAS IT SUDDENLY
REAPPEARED
NOW?

THE
TIMING IS
JUST TOO
CONVENIENT.



IT
DOESN'T
SIT
WELL
WITH
ME.



WE AGREE.
IT FEELS
AS THOUGH
SOMEONE IS
PULLING THE
STRINGS.



DAMN
THOSE
GEEZERS.

STILL
MEDDLING
EVEN
NOW...



SOMEHOW
I GET THE
FEELING
LORD
ADVISOR SA
EVEN SAW
TO THAT.

NOW THAT I
THINK ABOUT
IT, IT WAS A
BLESSING
THAT THE
RING STAYED
LOST THIS
PAST YEAR.

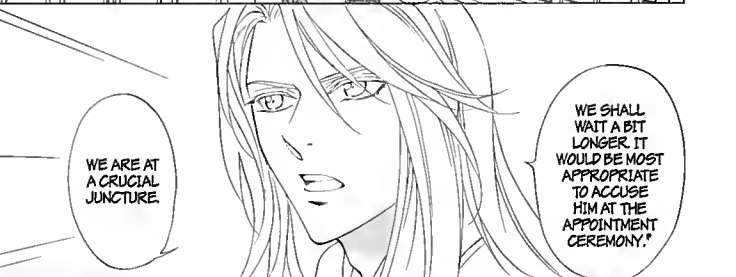
THANKS TO
THE RING'S
ABSENCE, THE
SA CLAN IS RIFE
WITH INFIGHTING—
SO MUCH SO THAT
THEY HAVEN'T BEEN
MEDDLING IN OUR
GOVERNANCE
OF SA PROVINCE
AS THEY
USUALLY DO.



AND WHAT OF
THE ARREST
WE WERE
PLANNING TO
MAKE IN THE
MINISTRY
OF RITES? I
BELIEVE THE
EVIDENCE
SHOULD BE
IN ORDER BY
NOW.

YES,
PLEASE
FIND IT.

HOW
SHALL WE
PROCEED,
YOUR
HIGHNESS?
SEARCH FOR
THE
REAL
RING?



WE ARE AT
A CRUCIAL
JUNCTURE.

WE SHALL
WAIT A BIT
LONGER. IT
WOULD BE MOST
APPROPRIATE
TO ACCUSE
HIM AT THE
APPOINTMENT
CEREMONY.*



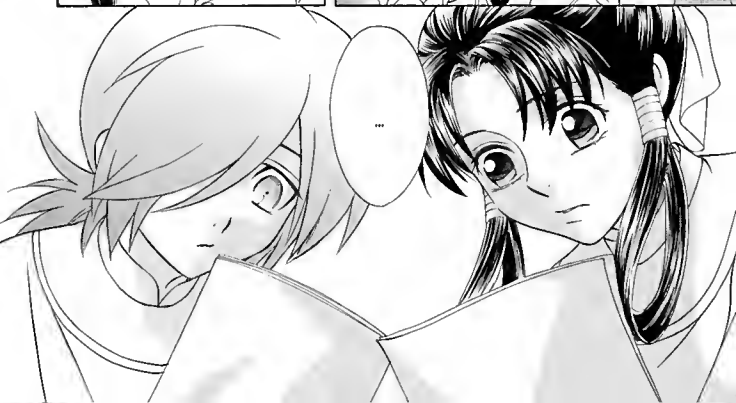
KOYU?



RIGHT,
KOYU?

I UNDERSTAND,
AND IT DOES SEEM
OUR TARGET WILL
ONLY DIG HIMSELF
DEEPER THE
LONGER WE LEAVE
HIM TO HIS OWN
DEVICES.

*Appointment Ceremony: The ceremony in which the emperor appoints civil servants to new posts.





OH! WHY DON'T WE USE THIS FOR OFFICIAL RO'S REPORT? WE CAN DO A JOINT ONE.



...FROM THE SAME MINISTRY.

THESE ARE...

THE SUBJECT MATTER MIGHT BE A BIT OVERAMBITIOUS FOR NOVICES LIKE US, BUT SINCE WE DON'T HOLD AN OFFICIAL RANK...

...IT SHOULDN'T BE A PROBLEM IF WE MAKE A FEW SMALL MISTAKES WHILE TRYING TO TAKE THIS ON!



WE CAN GET STARTED AFTER WE FINISH TODAY'S WORK

HEH

HEH
HEH

THEN LET'S NOT DELAY.

JOLT

YOU'RE PLANNING ON DOING EVEN MORE AFTER YOU FINISH WORK TODAY?



OFFICIAL RO DID SAY WE WERE FREE TO WRITE ON ANY TOPIC WE WANTED.

I AGREE! THIS MIGHT BE AN EXCELLENT PROJECT.



HAKU! YOU
CAME TO
HELP US
AGAIN?



KRRK

MAYBE YOU
SHOULDN'T
GET ON
OFFICIAL
RO'S BAD
SIDE.

YOU'RE THE
WEALTHY SON
OF THE NOBLE
HEKI CLAN.
YOU ARE THE
INDUCTEE
WITH THE
BEST
PROSPECTS.

HAKUMEI...
ARE YOU
SURE IT'S
OKAY TO
HELP US
LIKE
THIS?



ARE YOU
INCAPABLE
OF DOING
YOUR OWN
WORK?

PATHETIC.
IT IS A
DISGRACE
TO THE
JOGEN
AND TANKA
RANKS.

URK



SO HE DID.
AND I HEARD
YOU TWO ALSO
SUFFERED
REPERCUS-
SIONS AFTER
I OFFERED
TO HELP.

I'VE HEARD
THAT AFTER
YOU STOOD
UP FOR US,
HE STARTED
INCREASING
YOUR
WORKLOAD
AS WELL.



ME TOO. WITH ALL OF US TOGETHER LIKE THIS, IT DOESN'T BOTHER ME AT ALL WHEN WE GET YELLED AT.



AND I'M HAPPY YOU'RE HERE.

THANKS TO YOUR HELP, THE AMOUNT OF SLEEP I GET EVERY NIGHT HAS GONE UP.

I DIDN'T MIND. IT WAS JUST ONE MORE LITTLE PUNISHMENT ON TOP OF A GREAT MANY HE'S ALREADY LAID ON US.



DESPITE NOT BEING BORN IN ONE OF THE SEVEN GREAT CLANS, HE ROSE TO THE POSITION OF VICE MINISTER AT AN INCREDIBLY YOUNG AGE AND IS NOW AMONG THE EMPEROR'S INNER CIRCLE!



THIS IS FOR MY PRIDE AS WELL!

DON'T MISTAKE ME!

SHING



HE SHOT UP THE RANKS ON THE SHORTEST PATH TO PROMOTION EVER WITNESSED ON PURE BRILLIANCE AND ABILITY ALONE! HE IS CONSIDERED BY ALL TO BE THE GREATEST MIND AT COURT!



MARK MY WORD—HELL BE THE YOUNGEST PRIME MINISTER EVER INAUGURATED!

MY ULTIMATE GOAL IS TO BE LIKE MASTER KOYURI! UNDERSTAND?



CAREFULLY
CONSIDERING
EACH MOVE,
THEN MOVING
DECISIVELY...!
HE'S LIKE AN
IMPREGNABLE
FORTRESS!

EVER
CALM AND
COOL IN
MANNER...

OVER-
FLOWING
WITH
WISDOM...



AND HE
DOES
LOSE HIS
TEMPER
RATHER
EASILY...

HE MAY HAVE
TAKEN THE
SHORTEST PATH
TO PROMOTION,
BUT HE JUST
WANDERS
ABOUT LOST
ON MANY
OTHERS...



SO
WHAT IF
IT IS?

C
A
R
E
F
R
E
E

I HEARD A RUMOR
THAT, OUT OF
RESPECT FOR
MASTER KOYU
BECOMING THE
YOUNGEST JOGEN AT
AGE 16, YOU DELAYED
TAKING THE EXAM
FOR A YEAR SO YOU
WOULDN'T BREAK HIS
RECORD? IS THAT
TRUE?



HOW
COULD I
COME IN
FOURTH?!

...THEN LOST
BOGEN TO SOME
GALLIVANTING
FOOL FROM THE
RAN CLAN AND
TANKA TO A LITTLE
GIRL ON TOP OF
EVERYTHING
ELSE!

AND BECAUSE
OF THAT, I ENDED
UP LOSING THE
JOGEN TITLE TO
SOME CAREFREE
LITTLE WOODLAND
CREATURE WHO'D
BARELY TURNED
THIRTEEN...

GRA

BUT NO LONGER!
I VOW MY
PLANS
SHALL NOT
GO ASTRAY
AGAIN!

I WILL
BECOME
A TOP
OFFICIAL
ON MY OWN
STRENGTH
AND
ABILITY!!

THAT
DESPICABLE OLD
MAN ACCEPTED
BRIBES FROM
INCOMPETENT
INDUCTEES TO
LESSEN THEIR
WORKLOADS! AS
THOUGH I'D EVER
SEEK FAVOR
FROM HIM!

HOW THE
FATES
CONSPIRE
TO THWART
ME!

ALL MY
ELABORATE
PLANS WERE
DERAILED
FROM THE
OUTSET!!

I'M
SORRY!

BAW

AFTER ALL,
DIDN'T MASTER
KOYU'S CAREER
FOLLOW THE
VERY SAME
PATH?

SURELY IT IS
FATE THAT I
SHOULD GO
FORTH AS HE
DID, FACING
THE SAME
TRIALS HE
DID!

UH,
HAKUMEI
...



THAT
REMINDS ME--
YOU BUMPED
HEADS OFTEN
WITH RYUREN
IN THE
PREPARA-
TION HALLS,
DIDN'T YOU?

YOU'RE
CERTAINLY
GETTING
WORKED UP
OVER THIS,
HAKUMEI.



I SHALL
NOT BE
COWED!

JUST WATCH ME!
IN JUST A FEW
YEARS I'LL HAVE
ATTAINED SUCH
HEIGHTS THAT
I'LL BE ABLE TO
SNUB OFFICIAL RO
AND WORK HIM AS
HARD AS I WISH!



R-RIGHT!

SO
FINISH
IT!

YES!



Though
you are
a really
good
person...

YOU TRULY
ARE A
SERIOUS,
OBSTINATE
BOY, AREN'T
YOU?

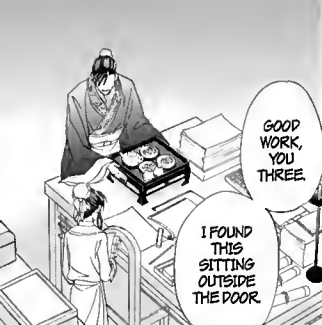


HARD AT
WORK AS
ALWAYS, I
SEE.



NOW
LISTEN
HERE!

TOMORROW IS
OUR ONE REST
DAY FOR THE
WEEK. IF WE
DON'T FINISH
THIS TONIGHT,
YOU'LL HAVE TO
COME BACK ON
YOUR DAY OFF!



GOOD
WORK,
YOU THREE.

I FOUND
THIS
SITTING
OUTSIDE
THE DOOR.

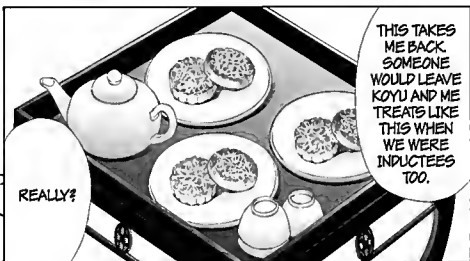


GENERAL
RAN....!

MASTER
SHUE!



OH!
THERE ARE
THREE
SERVINGS
NOW.



REALLY?!

THIS TAKES
ME BACK.
SOMEONE
WOULD LEAVE
KOYU AND ME
TREATS LIKE
THIS WHEN
WE WERE
INDUCTEES
TOO.



IF ANYTHING,
WOODLAND
CREATURE,
YOU SHOULD
BE HAVING
WINE, NOT
SNACKS.

YOU SAY YOU
HAVE THE
LEISURE TO
STOP FOR A
SNACK?



ONE MUST BE FOR
HAKUMEI. HE'S
BEEN COMING
EVERY NIGHT TO
HELP US.



SOMEONE
PREPARED THIS
SPECIALLY
FOR US, SO
LET'S TAKE
A MOMENT
TO ENJOY IT,
YOU TWO.

B-BUT I
REALLY
CAN'T
DRINK
WINE—

IF YOU REALLY
INTEND TO BE A
CIVIL SERVANT,
YOU CAN'T GO ON
REFUSING WINE
WHEN YOUR
SUPERIORS
OFFER IT TO
YOU!



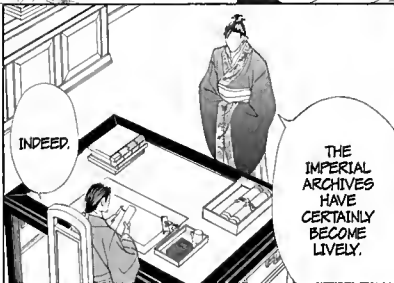
WHAT?!



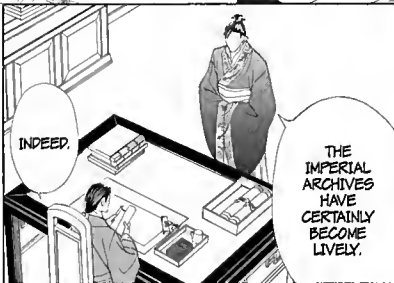
AH,
GENERAL
RAN,
COME IN.



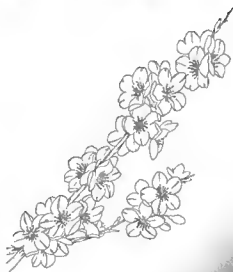
GOOD
EVENING,
MASTER
SHOKA



INDEED.



THE
IMPERIAL
ARCHIVES
HAVE
CERTAINLY
BECOME
LIVELY.



YES,
MASTER
SHOKA, I
WAS HOPING
TO ASK A
FAVOR OF
YOU...

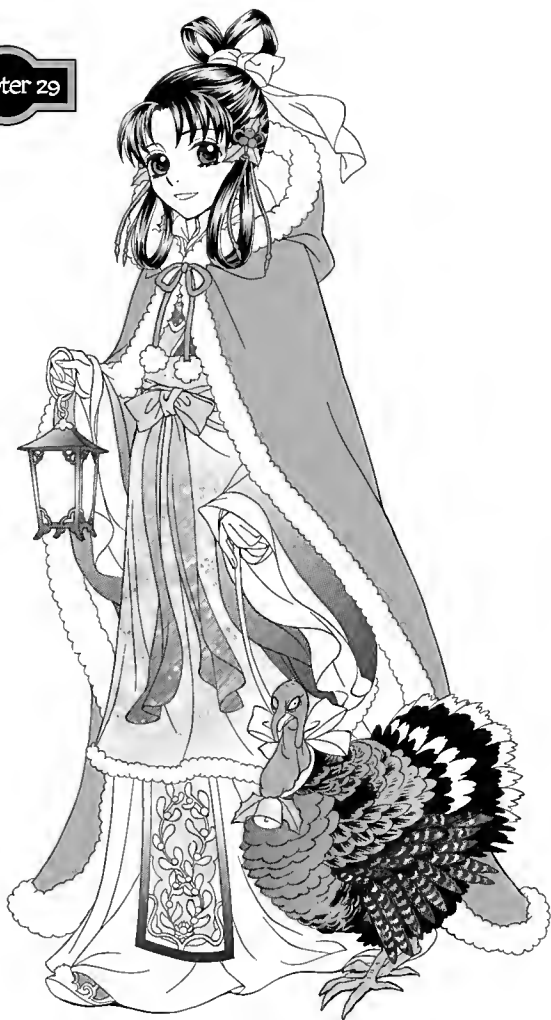


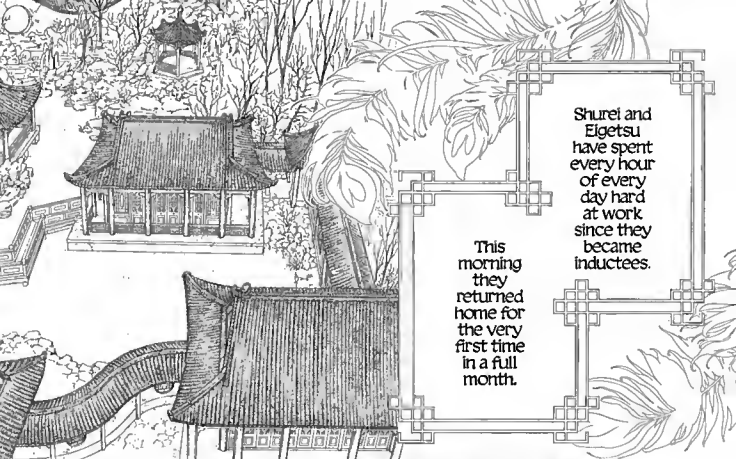
IS THERE
SOMETHING
ON YOUR
MIND?



The Story of
SAIUNKOKU

Chapter 29





Shurei and
Elgetsu
have spent
every hour
of every day
hard at work
since they
became
inductees.

This
morning
they
returned
home for
the very
first time
in a full
month.



THEY HAVE
HAD TO BE
CONSTANTLY
ON THEIR
GUARD
THIS PAST
MONTH.

PERHAPS
FINALLY
COMING HOME
MADE THEM
FORGET
THEM-
SELVES
A BIT.



OH DEAR...
THEY MADE
IT HOME
BUT NOT
QUITE
TO THEIR
BEDS, IT
SEEMS.

IT IS LITTLE
WONDER THEY
FEEL SO
RELIEVED.
THEY'VE GOTTEN
THROUGH A
MONTH SAFELY,
AND THEY
FINALLY HAVE
A MOMENT TO
REST.



THANK
YOU,
SEIRAN.

YOUR
TEA,
MY
LORD.



MY
LORD?



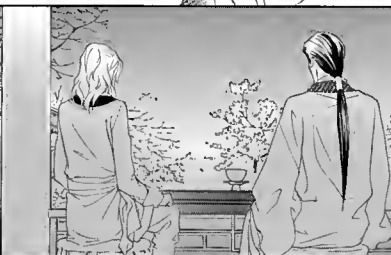
WHENEVER I
ASKED YOU TO
MAKE TEA IN
THE PAST, YOU
WOULD STUFF
THE TEACUPS
TO THE BRIM
WITH TEA
LEAVES.



YOU'VE
BECOME ADEPT
AT MAKING A
DELICIOUS CUP
OF TEA.



LET US
NOT TALK
OF OLD
THINGS,
MY LORD!



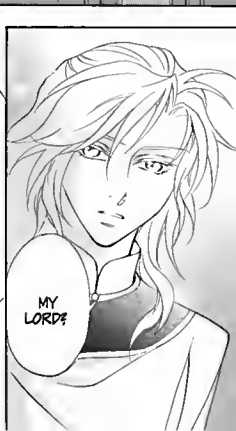
YOU SHOULD
LIVE YOUR
LIFE AS
YOU WISH,
SEIRAN.



PARENTS
SHOULD NOT
BECOME A
BURDEN TO
THEIR CHILDREN
AND HOLD
THEM BACK SO
YOU NEEDN'T
CONCERN
YOURSELF
OVER ME.



EVER SINCE
MY WIFE AND
I FOUND YOU
AND GAVE
YOU YOUR
NAME, I HAVE
THOUGHT OF
YOU AS MY
OWN SON.



MY
LORD?



YOU
MADE ME
A PROMISE
THAT YOU'D
PROTECT MY
DAUGHTER...

I KNOW
YOU'VE
BEEN
CONFLICTED
LATELY.

BUT YOU
ARE A
MAN WHO
KNOWS HIS
OWN MIND
AND CAN
CHOOSE
THE BEST
COURSE OF
ACTION.

...UNTIL
THE DAY
COMES
WHEN SHE
CAN WALK
ON HER
OWN.

THAT IS WHY
MY LATE WIFE
ENTRUSTED
YOU WITH
SHUREI'S
WELL-BEING.

ALL
RIGHT?
IT'S A
PROMISE.

I'VE SAID IT
BEFORE, HAVEN'T
I? YOU ARE A
PART OF OUR
FAMILY, SEIRAN.
PROMISE OR NO
PROMISE, THIS
WILL ALWAYS BE
YOUR HOME.

YOU WILL
ALWAYS BE
WELCOME
AT MY SIDE,
AND AT
SHUREI'S.

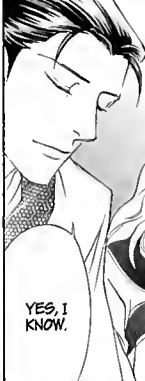
NO, MY
LORD...
MADAM
MADE ME
PROMISE
FOR MY
SAKE,
NOT LADY
SHUREI'S.

IT WAS TO
LET ME KNOW
IT WAS ALL
RIGHT FOR ME
TO STAY ON
LIVING WITH
YOU AND LADY
SHUREI.





AND I
ALSO
KNOW
YOU ARE
VERY
KIND.



YES, I
KNOW.

MY LORD...
IN TRUTH,
I AM AN
EXTREMELY
SELFISH
AND WILLFUL
PERSON.



THAT IS WHY
THE DECISION
YOU REACH
AFTER
DEBATING IT
SO LONG WILL
SURELY BE THE
RIGHT ONE.



THERE'S STILL
TIME BEFORE
SHUREI
RECEIVES
HER OFFICIAL
APPOINTMENT.

SO TAKE
YOUR TIME
TO MAKE
UP YOUR
MIND.



HUHZ

MM...



I...
OVER-
SLEPT...



OH NO! I'LL
BE LATE
FOR THE
MORNING
MEET-

MY
ROOM?

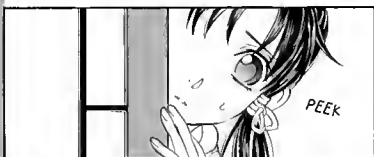
-ING...

Y
U
M
P



It's
actually
afternoon
now...

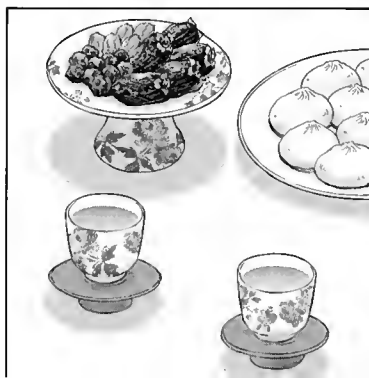
I'M SORRY,
FATHER,
SEIRAN. I
INTENDED
TO MAKE YOU
BREAKFAST,
BUT...

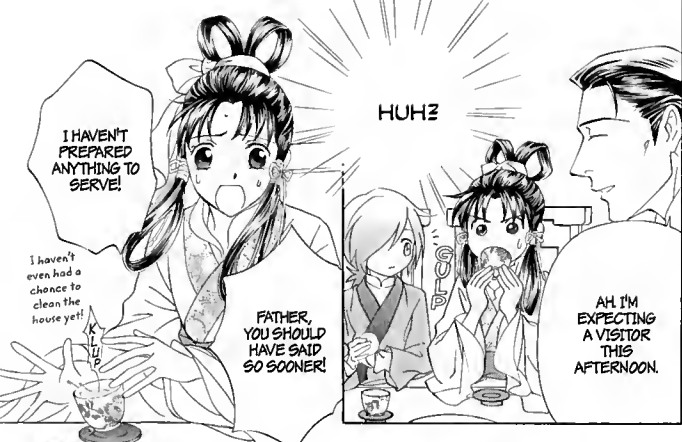


PEEK



WELL!
GOOD
MORNING,
SHUREI.





I HAVEN'T
PREPARED
ANYTHING TO
SERVE!

I haven't
even had a
chance to
clean the
house yet!

FATHER,
YOU SHOULD
HAVE SAID
SO SOONER!

HUH?

AH I'M
EXPECTING
A VISITOR
THIS
AFTERNOON.



HE'S A BUSY
MAN, SO I
DOUBT HE
WILL STAY FOR
VERY LONG.

NO
NEED
FOR
ALL
THAT.

BUT I'D LIKE TO
SPEAK WITH
HIM PRIVATELY,
SO IF YOU
WOULDN'T MIND,
WOULD THE
TWO OF YOU
GO OUT FOR A
BIT?

BUT...

That
worries
me...

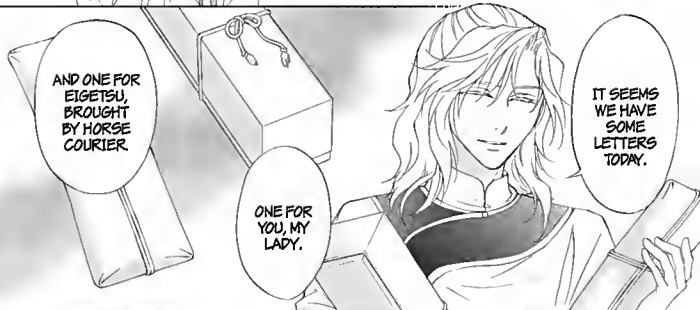


DON'T YOU
DARE TRY
TO MAKE
ANYTHING
ELSE, ALL
RIGHT,
FATHER!

I'LL LEAVE
SOME ICED
TEA IN A
PITCHER FOR
YOU TO SERVE.

So all you'll
have to do
is pour it,
okay?

ALL RIGHT. I'LL
PREPARE SOME
TEA CAKES FOR YOU, BUT
YOU ABSOLUTELY
MUST NOT ATTEMPT
TO MAKE TEA FOR
YOUR GUEST,
UNDERSTAND?!







I'M SORRY FOR
CALLING YOU
AWAY FROM
YOUR WORK
WHEN YOU'RE
UNDOUBTEDLY
BUSY.



WELCOME,
MASTER
KOYU.

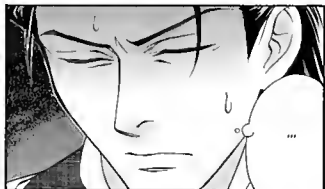


NO ONE
ELSE
IS IN
RIGHT
NOW.



ESPECIALLY
IF THAT
SOMETHING
WAS CAUSED
BY MY
HOPELESS
YOUNGER
BROTHER.

IT ISN'T MUCH,
BUT I AM
ALWAYS HAPPY
TO LEND A
SYMPATHETIC
EAR IF
SOMETHING
IS TROUBLING
YOU.





OH



DO YOU SEE
THAT PLUM
TREE? WE
RECEIVED
IT AS A GIFT
THIS YEAR

IT ARRIVED
VERY
SHORTLY
AFTER HIS
MAJESTY
SENT US
THE CHERRY
TREE
SAPLING.



YOU SEE, BE
IT FRUIT OR
FLOWER, THE
PLUM HAS
ALWAYS BEEN
REISHIN'S
FAVORITE.



IN FACT, I
AM LIKELY
THE ONLY
PERSON
WHO HAS A
CLEAR IDEA
OF THEM.

BEING THE
CONTRARY
PERSON HE IS,
MY YOUNGER
BROTHER
RARELY
EXPRESSES
HIS LIKES
AND DISLIKES
OPENLY.

THE
PLUM
...2*

*Koyu's surname Ri means "plum" or "plum tree."



REISHIN...
HAS NO
FONDNESS
FOR THE
HONG
CLAN.

AND THE
FACT THAT
NOT ALL OF
ITS FRUIT
IS SWEET
SUITS
ME VERY
WELL
INDEED.

I ALSO FIND
IT ADMIRABLE
HOW PLUM
TREES HAVE
THE TENACITY
TO FLOURISH IN
ANY TYPE OF
ENVIRONMENT.

IT ISN'T JUST THE
BEAUTY OF ITS
BLOSSOMS OR
THE TASTE OF ITS
FRUIT. EVEN THE
ROOTS OF A PLUM
TREE CAN BE USED
TO MAKE MEDICINE.
ISN'T IT AMAZING
THAT EVEN IN
ITS UNSEEN
PARTS, THIS TREE
PROVIDES SUCH
BENEFITS?





I BELIEVE
HE DOES
NOT WANT
YOU TO BE
FETTERED
IN THE
SAME WAY.

IF HE HAD
GIVEN YOU
THE NAME OF
HONG, YOU
WOULD HAVE
BEEN PULLED
INTO THE DARK
REALMS OF
OUR CLAN'S
POLITICS
WITHOUT A
CHOICE.

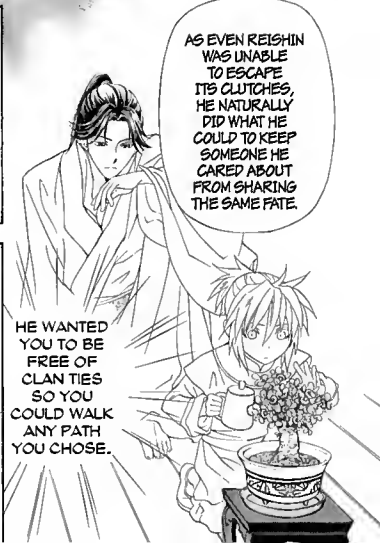
HE RESENTS
THEM FOR
CERTAIN
DECISIONS
THEY MADE
CONCERNING
ME.

IN THE END
HE WAS
UNABLE TO
ESCAPE THE
OBLIGATIONS
OF OUR
FAMILY.

DESPITE
THAT, HE
WAS NOT
ALLOWED TO
ABDICATE
HIS PLACE
AS HEAD OF
THE CLAN.



MASTER
SHOKA...



AS EVEN REISHIN
WAS UNABLE
TO ESCAPE
ITS CLUTCHES,
HE NATURALLY
DID WHAT HE
COULD TO KEEP
SOMEONE HE
CARED ABOUT
FROM SHARING
THE SAME FATE.

HE WANTED
YOU TO BE
FREE OF
CLAN TIES
SO YOU
COULD WALK
ANY PATH
YOU CHOSE.

I'M SURE
YOU'VE
REALIZED
IT
YOURSELF
BY NOW.

THE NAME
REISHIN
GAVE
YOU IS A
SYMBOL
OF THIS.



IT IS PROOF
OF THE
PRIDE HE
FEELS IN
HAVING YOU
FOR A SON.

THE "KO"
IN KOYU
IS A RED
FAR TRUER
THAN THE
CRIMSON OF
"HONG."

AND THE
"YU" IN YOUR
NAME, WHICH
SYMBOLIZES
THE RUSHING
FLOW OF
WATER...

...MARKS
HIS WISH
THAT YOU
GO FREELY
WHEREVER
YOU
DESIRE,
JUST AS
RUNNING
WATER
FLOWS.

IF YOU WISH
TO GO, THEN
YOU SHOULD
SIMPLY GO.
IT'S YOUR LIFE
AFTER ALL.

MY
BROTHER
NAMED
YOU WELL
INDEED.



HOW IT
SURPRISED
ME
WHEN MY
BROTHER
TOOK HIM
IN!

YOU WERE
THE ONE WHO
CHANGED
REISHIN'S
MIND ABOUT
CHILDREN.
HE'D INTENDED
NEVER TO HAVE
ANY.

AND THE LOOK ON
HIS FACE WHEN
HE HEARD YOU
HAD PASSED THE
IMPERIAL EXAM
AS THE JOGEN—
IN ALL MY LIFE,
I HAVE NEVER
SEEN HIM
SO PROUD.

HOW COULD
I HAVE
ALLOWED
THE WORDS
OF AN
OUTSIDER
TO
INFLUENCE
ME SO?

I'M A
FOOL.

L...

I JUST
HOPED TO
STAY BY HIS
SIDE AND
BE OF SOME
USE TO HIM
UNTIL THAT
TIME...

...AND I TOLD
MYSELF I'D
UNDERSTAND
IF HE EVER
DECIDED TO
THROW ME
OUT AGAIN.

...HAD
ALWAYS
BELIEVED
HE HAD
TAKEN ME
IN ON A
WHIM...

SUCCINCT

CERTAINLY NOT!

THOUGH I WILL NOT STOP YOU IF YOU TRULY DESIRE TO PURSUE THE ART OF MAKING DIM SUM.

I WOULD BE VERY GLAD INDEED IF YOU WOULD STAY WITH HIM FOR AS LONG AS YOUR PATIENCE WITH HIS WAYS WILL LAST.

THAT HAS A WONDERFUL RING TO IT.

MASTER SHOKA'S NEPHEW ...

I'M GLAD TO HEAR IT, YOU ARE ALSO A PRECIOUS NEPHEW TO ME, YOU KNOW.

SMILE

YOU HAVE A VERY GOOD FRIEND IN HIM.

HUH?

IF YOU THANK ANYONE, THANK GENERAL RAN.

I TRULY THANK YOU, MASTER SHOKA. MY HEART IS MUCH EASED.



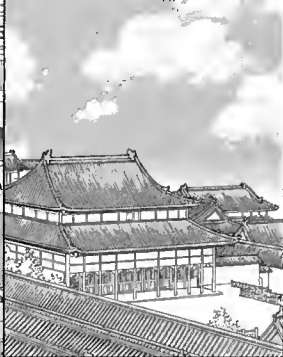


WELCOME,
KURO.

IT HAS
BEEN LONG
SINCE WE
LAST MET,
BROTHER.



I HAVE
RETURNED.



SO YOU'RE
FINALLY BACK,
ARE YOU? I'M
SURE YOU MUST
HAVE HAD A
WONDERFUL TIME
DELIGHTING IN
MY BROTHER'S
COMPANY?



KURO
CAME
BY.



YES, I
DID.



SO HE
HASN'T
BEEN TO
SEE YOU, I
TAKE IT.

LORD
KURO?!

IN THAT
CASE, HE
HAS SURELY
GONE TO
BROTHER
SHOKA'S!

TO WHAT
END
WOULD HE
JOURNEY
HERE
TO SHI
PROVINCE?



Kuro
Hong,
third son
of the
Hong
family

As a son of
the main
family, he is a
driving force
supporting
the clan with
his strong will
and capable
personality.

He currently
serves as
acting head
of the clan
in Reishin's
absence from
Hong Province.



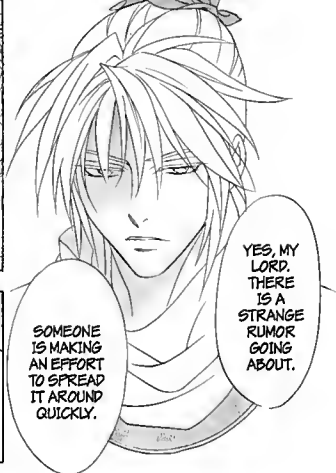
IN THE COURSE
OF THIS SINGLE
DAY THAT
SHUREI IS AWAY
FROM COURT,
DO YOU NOT
SENSE A GREAT
SHIFT IN THE
ATMOSPHERE
HERE?

KOYU.

WELL, HIS
PRESENCE AT
THE MOMENT
WILL BE OF
USE TO ME.

IT SEEMS
OUR FOOLISH
OPPONENT
IS MAKING A
MOVE...







HOW
DARE
HE...!

UNLAWFUL
INTERVEN-
TION..?



!

UNDER SUSPICION
OF UNLAWFUL
INTERVENTION
ON BEHALF OF AN
IMPERIAL CIVIL
EXAMINEE,
WE HAVE BEEN
ORDERED TO
CONFINE YOU
IMMEDIATELY!



SULLYING THE
ACCOMPLISH-
MENT THAT
GIRL WORKED
HERSELF
RAGGED TO
ACHIEVE WITH
ACCUSATIONS
OF
FAVORITISM....!



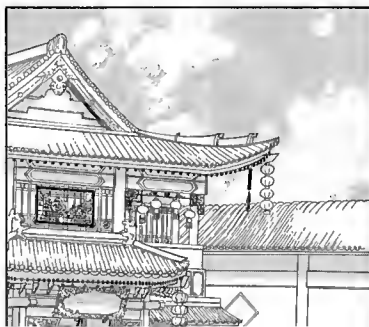
I SEE
HIS
IMBECILIC
PLAN
NOW.

I KNEW
HE WOULD
ATTEMPT
SOMETHING,
BUT THE
NERVE OF
ATTACKING ME
WITH THAT...



THAT
BALD-
ING...

VOLT

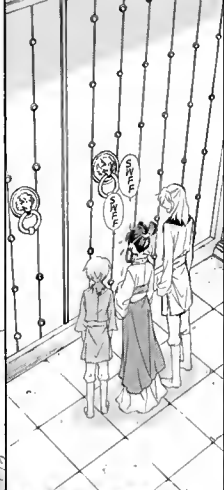




KRIK



KOCHO!



KOCHO...

SWIP



WELCOME,
SHUREI,
AND THE
LITTLE
MASTER
AS WELL.

I AM
GRATEFUL
YOU TOOK
THE
TIME TO
READ MY
LETTER.



Z



HU#

SOME-
THING
SEEMS
ODD.

51



KOCHO#



MY
LADY.



HOWEVER, AS
SOON AS SHE
BECAME A HIGH
AND MIGHTY
CIVIL SERVANT,
WE HAVEN'T
SEEN HIDE NOR
HAIR OF HER.



YOU SEE, THIS
GIRL WORKED
HERE FOR
MANY YEARS
AND OWES A
GREAT DEBT
OF GRATITUDE
TO ME.



KOCHO
...?!

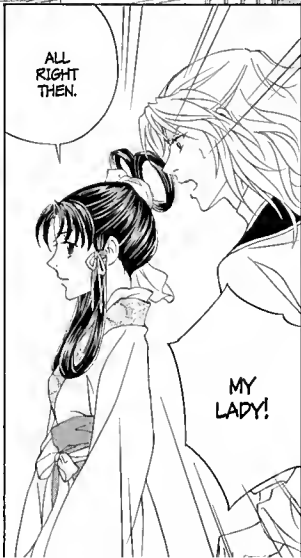


YOU WOULDN'T
WANT
ANYTHING TO
HAPPEN TO
YOUR DEAR
FATHER,
WOULD YOU?



YOU WILL
REMAIN
HERE
AWHILE.
THERE IS
A CERTAIN
VALUABLE
CUSTOMER
HERE WHO
WISHES IT
SO.

UNFORTUNATELY
YOU CANNOT
DECLINE HIS
REQUEST. HE IS
NOT A MAN WHOM
COMMON PEOPLE
WITHOUT RANK
MAY DEFY.



ALL
RIGHT
THEN.

MY
LADY!



YOU WILL
LEAVE QUIETLY
NOW. THE
INVITATION
ONLY EXTENDS
TO THESE TWO
YOUNG ONES.



SEIRAN
...?

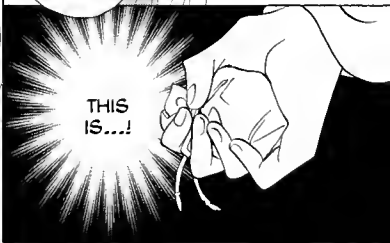


I PROBABLY
WON'T BE OF
MUCH HELP, BUT
I WILL DO ALL I
CAN TO PROTECT
MISS SHUREI.



MASTER
SEIRAN...

I RECEIVED
THIS FROM
HIS MAJESTY.
PLEASE USE
IT IF YOU
WILL.



THIS
IS....!

THANK
YOU.
PLEASE
TAKE
CARE OF
HER.

I
WILL.



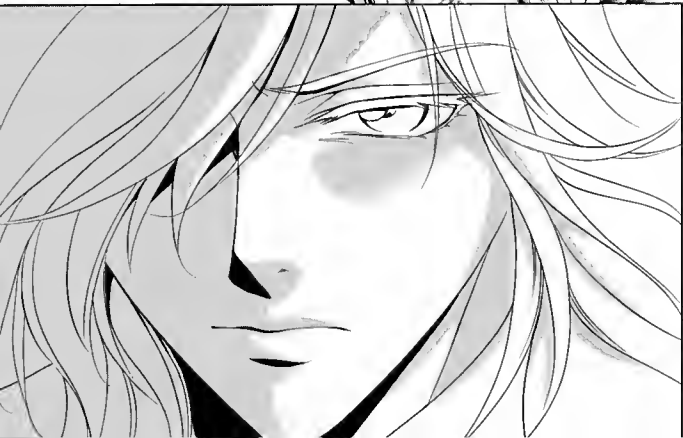
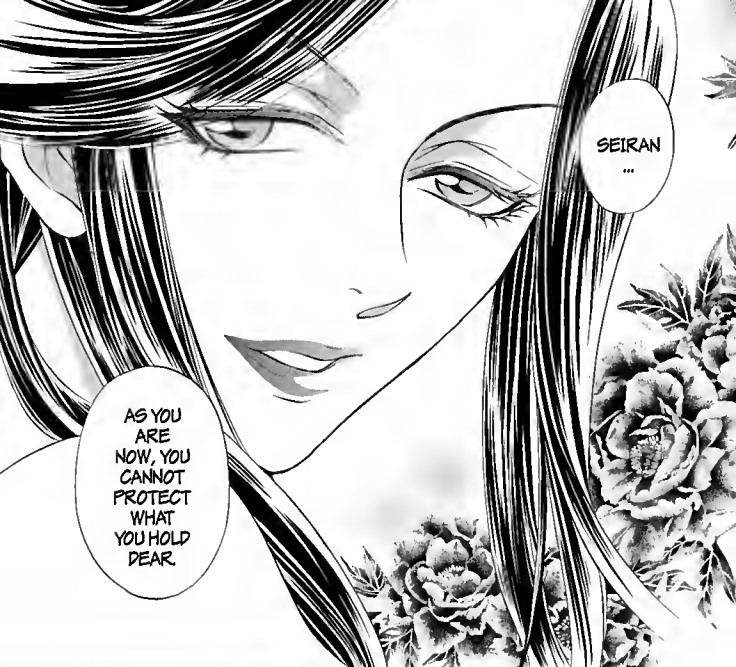
MY,
WHAT A
FRIGHTEN-
ING FACE.



NOW
HURRY
AND
LEAVE.

SUCH A
SHAME.

IF ONLY YOU
HAD BEEN A
HIGH-RANKING
SOLDIER LIKE
GENERAL RAN.
THEN ALL THIS
MIGHT HAVE
TURNED OUT
DIFFERENTLY...





BUT WE
GAVE THAT
SEAL TO
EIGETSU.

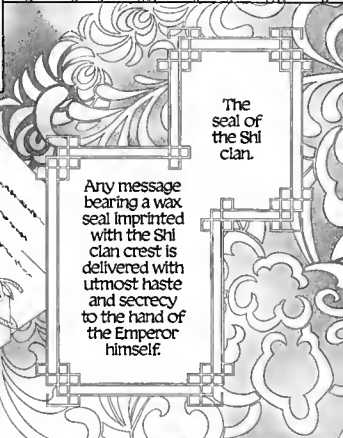


FROM
SEIRAN?



YOUR
HIGHNESS,
HERE'S A
MESSAGE
FROM
SEIRAN
BEARING THE
SEAL OF THE
SHI CLAN.*

*Shi clan: The noble clan that holds the imperial seat in Saiunkoku.



The
seal of the
Shi
clan.

Any message
bearing a wax
seal imprinted
with the Shi
clan crest is
delivered with
utmost haste
and secrecy to
the hand of
the Emperor
himself.



YES. THEY
SAY THAT
SHUREI
PASSED THE
IMPERIAL
CIVIL EXAM
DUE TO
FAVORITISM.

I MENTIONED
THE STRANGE
SWIFTNESS
WITH WHICH
CERTAIN
RUMORS WERE
SPREADING
TODAY,
RIGHT?



WHAT?
HOW DID
THIS
HAPPEN?!

I'll read
it too
with your
permis-
sion.

YOUR
HIGHNESS...
IT MAY BE
RELATED TO
THE RECENT
ARREST OF
REISHIN HONG.



I'M CERTAIN
THAT MAN
WANTED TO
STRIKE NOW
BEFORE THE
BALANCE
COULD
SHIFT.

THERE
ARE SOME
OFFICIALS WHO
ACKNOWLEDGE
LADY SHUREI'S
ABILITY, BUT
THEY ARE
STILL IN THE
MINORITY.

IT APPARENTLY
BEGAN IN THE
MINISTRY
OF RITES.
BECAUSE THAT
DEPARTMENT
OVERSEES
THE EXAM,
THOSE RUMORS
GAINED SOME
CREDIBILITY.

INCIDENTALLY,
SOME
INTERESTING
NEWS CAME
THROUGH
MY CLAN'S
INTELLIGENCE
NETWORK.

W-
WHAT
NEWS?

AH...

HE MUST HAVE
FOOLISHLY
DECIDED TO
KILL TWO
BIRDS WITH
ONE STONE BY
INCRIMINATING
LORD REISHIN.

IT APPEARS
HE PAID OFF
SOME OF THE
LOWER-RANKING
MEMBERS OF
THE 10TH GUARD
TO MAKE THE
ARREST.

THE ACTING
HEAD OF
THE HONG
CLAN, KURO
HONG, IS
CURRENTLY
IN KIYO.

HE IS
PRESENTLY
AT THE
HOME OF
MASTER
SHOKA.

GLOOM

IF THAT MAN
WOULD ONLY
GO ONE STEP
FURTHER IN HIS
ARROGANCE
AND MAKE A
BLUNDER, WE
WOULD HAVE A
HAND TO PLAY
BACK AT HIM..

THE MAIN
HONG
FAMILY IS
FRIGHTEN-
ING WHEN
ANGERED.

WHICH IS
WHY WE
SHOULD
AIM TO
RESOLVE
THIS
SITUATION
QUICKLY
AND WITH
AS LITTLE
DAMAGE AS
POSSIBLE.

Please
don't look
like you're
about to
cry.

FEAR NOT.
HE HAS
MADE A
BLUNDER

IT APPEARS
HE'S ALREADY
STARTED A
PETITION
TO REVOKE
SHUREI HONG'S
STATUS AS AN
INDUCTEE.

AND I
HAVE THE
PROOF
RIGHT
HERE.

WE PROPOSE
THAT
TOMORROW
A TRIAL BE
HELD TO
INVESTIGATE
THIS MATTER

UNTIL INITIATE
HONG PROVIDES
IRREFUTABLE
PROOF THAT SHE
IS CAPABLE OF
PASSING THE
EXAM AT SUCH A
HIGH RANKING,
WE CANNOT
RECOGNIZE HER
STATUS AS AN
INDUCTEE



WE SHALL
DRAFT AN
IMPERIAL
DECREE TO
ALERT THE
MINISTRIES
ABOUT THIS
TRIAL.

WE SHALL
PUT AN END
TO THIS AT
TOMORROW'S
TRIAL!

BAM

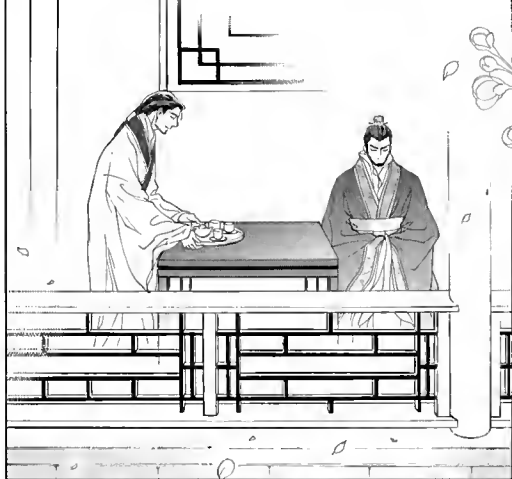


WELL
DONE
KOYU!



AND
NOW...

...WE
SHALL GO
PERSONALLY
TO FETCH
SHURE!



HE SAID YOU FOUND HIM SLEEPING AND TOOK HIM IN YOUR CARRIAGE TO THE NEXT TOWN. THEN YOU PAID FOR HIS ROOM AND BOARD FOR THE NIGHT.

IT SEEMS YOU ANTICIPATED MY VISIT.

YES. EIGETSU TOLD US...

...YOU RESCUED HIM ON THE ROAD.



FWP



ALLOW ME,
YOUR INFAMOUS
TEA IS
UNDRINKABLE,
BROTHER SHO.



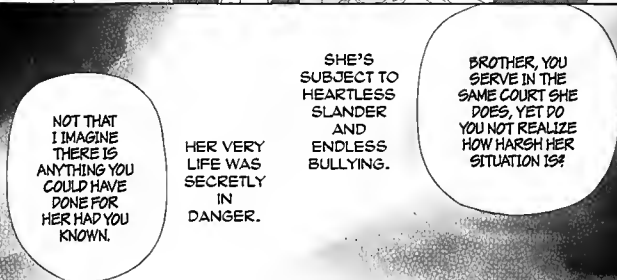
I JUST
THOUGHT
A DRUNKEN
BOY ON THE
ROADSIDE
WOULD CAUSE
A BLOCKAGE
FOR PASSING
TRAFFIC.

HAD HE
NOT BEEN
THE
JOGEN,
I WOULD
NOT HAVE
HELPED
HIM.



SHE'S
GROWN
QUITE
A BIT,
HASN'T
SHE?

I'VE SPENT
THE PAST
MONTH
LEARNING
OF SHUREI'S
ACCOMPLISH-
MENTS.



NOT THAT
I IMAGINE
THERE IS
ANYTHING YOU
COULD HAVE
DONE FOR
HER HAD YOU
KNOWN.

HER VERY
LIFE WAS
SECRETLY
IN
DANGER.

SHE'S
SUBJECT TO
HEARTLESS
SLANDER
AND
ENDLESS
BULLYING.

BROTHER, YOU
SERVE IN THE
SAME COURT SHE
DOES, YET DO
YOU NOT REALIZE
HOW HARSH HER
SITUATION IS?



YES, I
BELIEVE
THAT AS
WELL.

IF NOT FOR
OLDER
BROTHER
REI, OUR
CLAN WOULD
NOT HAVE
SURVIVED
THESE PAST
TEN OR SO
YEARS.

I HAVE NEVER
FELT EVEN
THE TINIEST
SHRED OF
REGRET FOR
DRIVING YOU
FROM THE
MAIN HOUSE.



YOU
KNOW
I HATE
YOU.



KURO...



EVEN SO, YOU
ARE STILL
OUR ELDEST
BROTHER AND
THE FIRST SON
OF THE MAIN
HONG FAMILY.

ONE DAY
WE SHALL
SUMMON
HER
BACK...

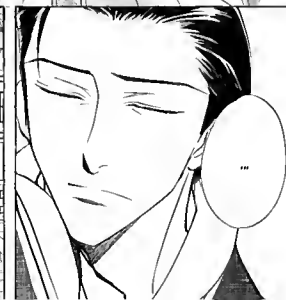
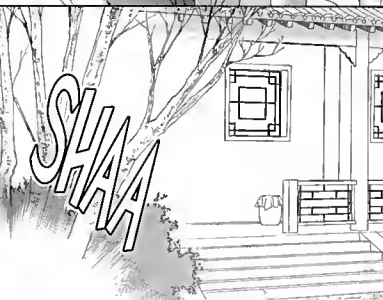
AND YOUR
DAUGHTER—
OUR COUNTRY'S
FIRST FEMALE
CIVIL SERVANT—
IS THE ELDEST
CHILD IN OUR
DIRECT LINE.

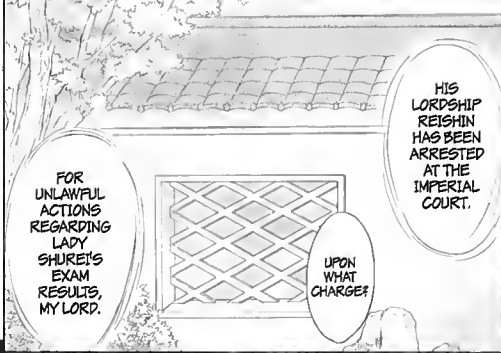


...FOR THE
FUTURE
PROSPERITY
OF THE HONG
CLAN.

...AND
MARRY
HER TO
KOYU.

SHE
SHALL
BECOME
LADY RI..



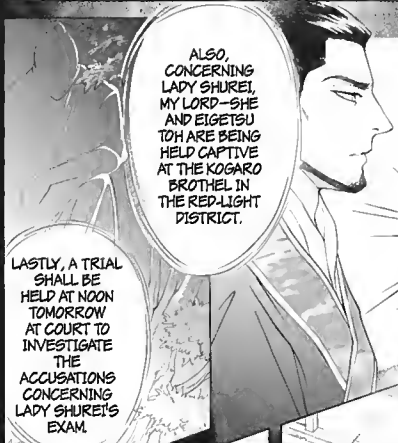


FOR
UNLAWFUL
ACTIONS
REGARDING
LADY
SHUREI'S
EXAM
RESULTS,
MY LORD.

HIS
LORDSHIP
REISHIN
HAS BEEN
ARRESTED
AT THE
IMPERIAL
COURT.

UPON
WHAT
CHARGE?

WHAT
IS IT?



ALSO,
CONCERNING
LADY SHUREI,
MY LORD—SHE
AND EIGETSU
TOH ARE BEING
HELD CAPTIVE
AT THE KOGARO
BROTHEL IN
THE RED-LIGHT
DISTRICT.

LASTLY, A TRIAL
SHALL BE
HELD AT NOON
TOMORROW
AT COURT TO
INVESTIGATE
THE
ACCUSATIONS
CONCERNING
LADY SHUREI'S
EXAM.

DID HE
ALLOW
HIMSELF
TO BE
ARRESTED?
TO WHAT
END?

LUDICROUS
AS THOUGH HE
WOULD EVER
BE SO SLOPPY
AS TO BE
CAUGHT FOR
ANY UNLAWFUL
ACTION.

I
SEE.



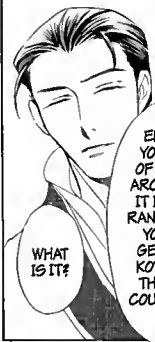
OLDER
BROTHER
SHO.



SO OLDER
BROTHER REI
WAS ARRESTED
AND SHUREI
WAS TAKEN
CAPTIVE TO
PREVENT
THEM FROM
ATTENDING THE
TRIAL.



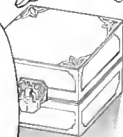
WHEN I
ENCOUNTERED
THE DRUNKEN
JOKEN BOY, HE
TRADED IT TO
ME TO SETTLE
HIS BAR TAB.



WHAT
IS IT?

EMPTY AS
YOUR TITLE
OF IMPERIAL
ARCHIVIST IS,
IT IS A HIGH-
RANKING POST.
YOU COULD
GET THIS TO
KOYU INSIDE
THE COURT,
COULDN'T YOU?

TUP



IT IS TIME WE
SHOWED THE
WORLD WHAT
HAPPENS TO
THOSE WHO
MAKE AN ENEMY
OF THE HONG
CLAN—AND
PARTICULARLY
OF ITS MAIN
FAMILY!

THIS ALONE
SHOULD BE
ENOUGH
EVIDENCE TO
BRING DOWN
OUR FOE.

THE
TIME
HAS
COME.

EVEN AFTER
THE MANY
YEARS I
SPENT IN
THEIR LOVING
COMPANY, I
STILL...

I HAD
ALWAYS
THOUGHT
MY LIFE
WAS OF
LITTLE
WORTH.

...THINK
THE
SAME.

THEY
GAVE ME
"SEIRAN"
AND WHAT
I DESIRED
MOST...

THEIR
SMILES...

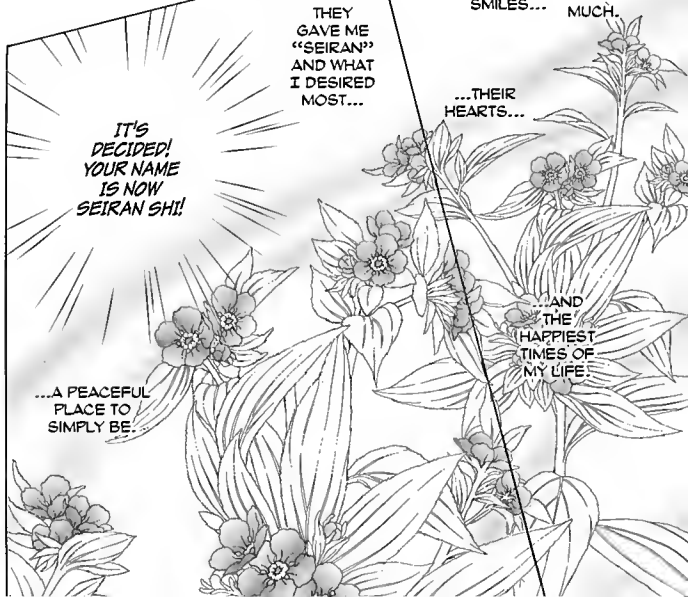
THIS
FAMILY
HAS
GIVEN
ME SO
MUCH.

...THEIR
HEARTS...

IT'S
DECIDED!
YOUR NAME
IS NOW
SEIRAN SHI!

...A PEACEFUL
PLACE TO
SIMPLY BE.

...AND
THE
HAPPIEST
TIMES OF
MY LIFE!



K
R
A
K

SHE WAS
SMILING
TO THE
VERY
END.

AND IN
A THIN,
WEAKENING
VOICE, SHE
GAVE ME
ONE MORE
THING—A
PROMISE
FOR ME TO
KEEP.

IT'S A
PROMISE
THEN,
SEIRAN.

IT STILL
STANDS,
EVEN IF I AM
NO LONGER
HERE.

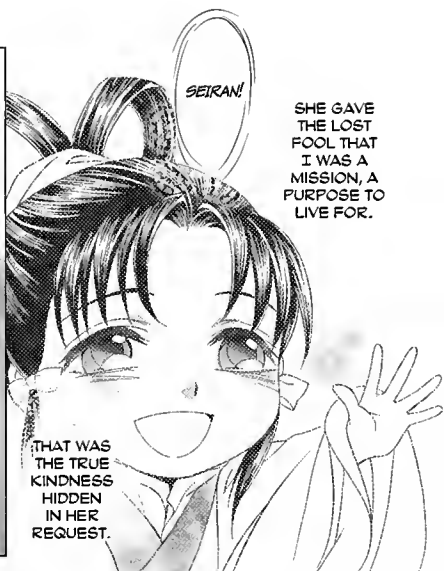
UNTIL THE
DAY SHE
CAN WALK
ON HER
OWN...

YOU
PROMISED
TO PROTECT
MY
DAUGHTER



IT WAS MY
LADY'S WAY
OF ENSURING
I PROTECTED
MYSELF IN
ORDER TO
KEEP MY
PROMISE.

ALL THESE
YEARS,
I WASN'T
THE ONE
PROTECTING
LADY
SHUREI



SEIRAN!

SHE GAVE
THE LOST
FOOL THAT
I WAS A
MISSION, A
PURPOSE TO
LIVE FOR.

THAT WAS
THE TRUE
KINDNESS
HIDDEN
IN HER
REQUEST.

...WHERE
I COULD
PROTECT
LORD
SHOKA
AND LADY
SHUREI...

LIVING
TOGETHER
IN THAT
MANOR...

I WANTED
THINGS
TO STAY
AS THEY
WERE.

I WANTED
THOSE
DAYS TO
GO ON
FOREVER.

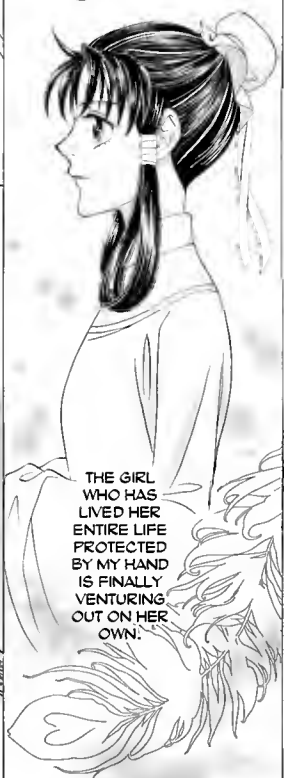




AS YOU
ARE
NOW, YOU
CANNOT
PROTECT
WHAT
YOU HOLD
DEAR.



BUT THE
TIME FOR
ME TO
TRULY
KEEP MY
PROMISE IS
COMING.



THE GIRL
WHO HAS
LIVED HER
ENTIRE LIFE
PROTECTED
BY MY HAND
IS FINALLY
VENTURING
OUT ON HER
OWN.



KLA

NG

EVER SINCE THAT FUSS
STARTED
UP AROUND
YOUR LITTLE
LADYSHIP, I
FIGURED I'D BE
SEEING YOU
SOON.

AH! SO
YOU'VE
FINALLY
COME
BACK,
HAVE
YOU?

SHINK

HIGH
GENERAL
HAKU.

I HAVE A
BOON TO
ASK OF
YOU.

A
SWORD.

THAT'S A
PLEASANT
FACE
YOU'RE
MAKING.

YOU'VE
MADE YOUR
DECISION,
HAVEN'T
YOU?

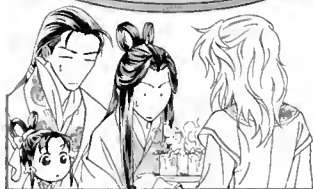
ASK IT.

WHAT
DO YOU
DESIRE?



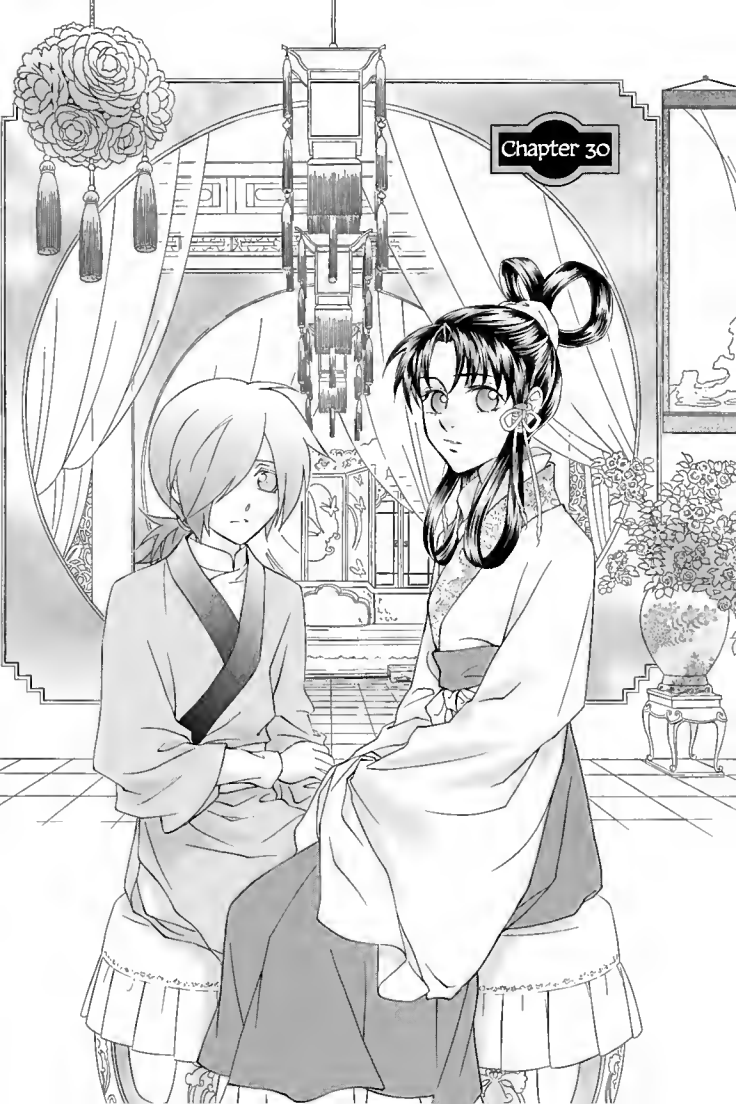
THIS
SWORD OF
THE YULIN
GUARD'S
IMPERIAL
SQUADRON
IS WHAT I
DESIRE.

AND THE
POWER TO
PROTECT
THOSE I
LOVE.



The Story of
SAIUNKOKU

Chapter 30





I
SUPPOSE
THIS
MAKES
IT VERY
CLEAR.

MAYBE
PEOPLE VIEW
ME AS AN
ENTIRELY
DIFFERENT
PERSON NOW
JUST BECAUSE
OF ONE SMALL
CHANGE IN
TITLE.

BUT
MAYBE
I WAS
WRONG.



WHEN I GO INTO
TOWN, I SPEAK
AND INTERACT
WITH
EVERYONE
JUST THE
SAME AS I
ALWAYS HAVE.
I THOUGHT
NOTHING HAD
CHANGED.

AFTER I
PASSED THE
EXAM AND
STARTED
SERVING
AT COURT,
I NEVER
THOUGHT
MYSELF
BETTER
THAN I WAS
BEFORE.

HUH?
WHY
DID I...?

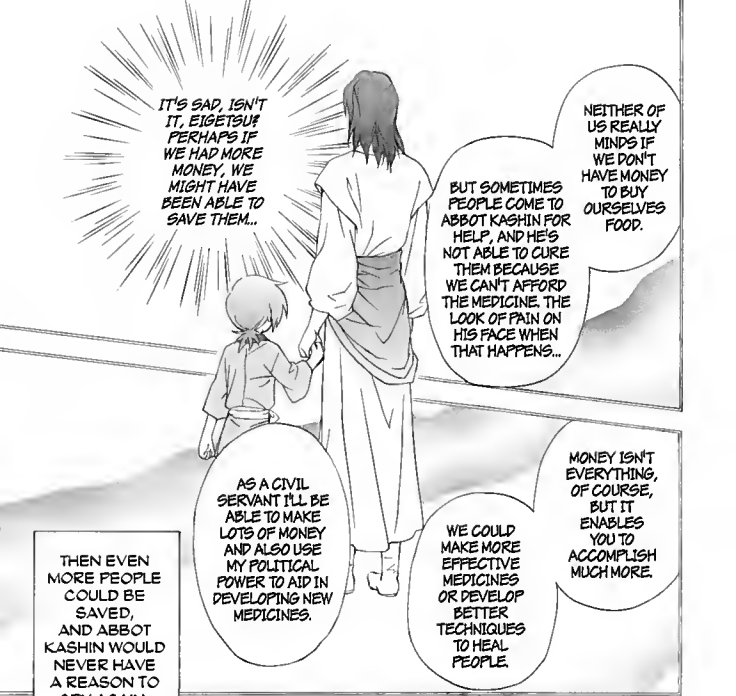
EIGETSU,
WHY DID
YOU DECIDE
TO BECOME
A CIVIL
SERVANT?

THEY'LL
ALL GO
BACK TO
NORMAL
SOON
ENOUGH.

THEY'RE
JUST A
LITTLE
CONFUSED
RIGHT
NOW.







IT'S SAD, ISN'T
IT, EIGETSU?
PERHAPS IF
WE HAD MORE
MONEY, WE
MIGHT HAVE
BEEN ABLE TO
SAVE THEM...

BUT SOMETIMES
PEOPLE COME TO
ABBOT KASHIN FOR
HELP, AND HE'S
NOT ABLE TO CURE
THEM BECAUSE
WE CAN'T AFFORD
THE MEDICINE. THE
LOOK OF PAIN ON
HIS FACE WHEN
THAT HAPPENS...

NEITHER OF
US REALLY
MINDS IF
WE DON'T
HAVE MONEY
TO BUY
OURSELVES
FOOD.

AS A CIVIL
SERVANT I'LL BE
ABLE TO MAKE
LOTS OF MONEY
AND ALSO USE
MY POLITICAL
POWER TO AID IN
DEVELOPING NEW
MEDICINES.

WE COULD
MAKE MORE
EFFECTIVE
MEDICINES
OR DEVELOP
BETTER
TECHNIQUES
TO HEAL
PEOPLE.

MONEY ISN'T
EVERYTHING,
OF COURSE,
BUT IT
ENABLES
YOU TO
ACCOMPLISH
MUCH MORE.

THEN EVEN
MORE PEOPLE
COULD BE
SAVED,
AND ABBOT
KASHIN WOULD
NEVER HAVE
A REASON TO
CRY AGAIN.



THAT'S WHY
I DECIDED
TO FOREGO
BECOMING
A DOCTOR
AND CHOSE
TO BECOME
A CIVIL
SERVANT
INSTEAD.



THERE ARE SO MANY THINGS I WANT TO DO, I'M TRYING TO ACCOMPLISH THEM AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE...

LIFE IS SHORT, AFTER ALL.



IF I EVER END UP RETIRING FROM CIVIL SERVICE, I'D LIKE TO BECOME A DOCTOR.

EIGETSU...

IT DOESN'T MATTER WHAT PEOPLE THINK OF ME.

WHAT'S IMPORTANT IS THAT I REMEMBER WHAT I SET OUT TO DO.

YOU'VE MADE ME REMEMBER WHY I WANTED TO BECOME A CIVIL SERVANT IN THE FIRST PLACE...!

...
THAT'S INCREDIBLE. YOU'VE REMINDED ME OF SOMETHING IMPORTANT AS WELL.



CHAK



THANK YOU, EIGETSU.

HUH?



THIS SHOULD BE EASY! LET'S GET SOME LIQUOR IN HIM AND HE'LL SPIT THE ANSWER RIGHT OUT.

Come here, you.



EIGETSU!

WHAT DO I CARE, KID?

Y-YOU CAN'T! IF I DRINK ALCOHOL, I'LL...



THIS LITTLE BRAT IS THE ONE? THE ONE THE MASTER TOLD US TO BEAT UNTIL HE TELLS US THE LOCATION OF THE JEWELRY BOX?



WHISK

IF YOU GET LONELY, I'LL COME AND PLAY WITH YOU.

YOU JUST SIT RIGHT HERE AND BE GOOD, LITTLE LADY.

AFTER ALL, WE'RE IN PERFECT PLACE FOR THAT.

WHAT?!



ONCE IN A WHILE DON'T DO NO HARM.

EH... SO YOU'RE INTO THAT KIND OF THING?



YOU'RE LUCKY, KID. THEY'VE GOT SOME HIGH-GRADE STUFF HERE, LIKE NOTHING YOU'VE TASTED IN YOUR LIFE!

STOP THAT! STOP RIGHT THIS INSTANT!



W-WELL
EXCUSE
ME FOR
HAVING
A PLAIN
FACE!

GLARE

YOUR FACE
IS PLAIN
AND YOU
AIN'T GOT
BREASTS
TO SPEAK
OF, BUT I DO
LIKE THOSE
EYES...

I LIKE
'EM
FEISTY.

HEH
HEH

OUCH!



WHOA!

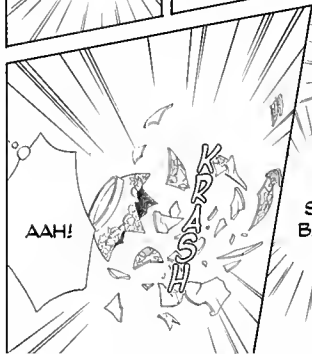


!

HEY, IF I
DO IT WITH
THE FIRST
FEMALE CIVIL
SERVANT IN
THE COUNTRY,
I MAY GO
DOWN IN
HISTORY TOO,
HUH?



BUT I'VE
GOT TO DO
SOMETHING...



AAH!

KRASH

STAY
BACK!



NO!

WATCH
OUT!



THUSSH
THUSSH
THAT ONE
COULDN'T
HAVE
BEEN LESS
THAN A
THOUSAND!

800
GOLD
RYO...

500
GOLD
RYO...

AN ENTIRE
HOUSE
COULD
BE BUILT
WITH THE
MONEY
FROM ONE
OF THESE!

AN
ENTIRE
HOUSE!!





GEH

SLASH

YOU
AGAIN?

YOU'RE
FREAKIN'
HOPE-
LESS.

IT'S...

WHO THE
HECK ARE
YOU?

...YOGETSU!

MORONS. THE
SECOND YOU
LET ME DRINK
A DROP OF
WINE, YOU
SEALED
YOUR FATE.

...he
transforms
into the
violent,
brawl-
mongering
Yogetsu.

Whenever
the gentle
Eigetsu
has a sip
of wine...

THOK

EEEEK!

IT'S MY
CONGRATULA-
TORY GIFT
TO YOU FOR
PASSING
YOUR
EXAM!

WOMAN,
CONSIDER
THIS A
SPECIAL
TREAT.

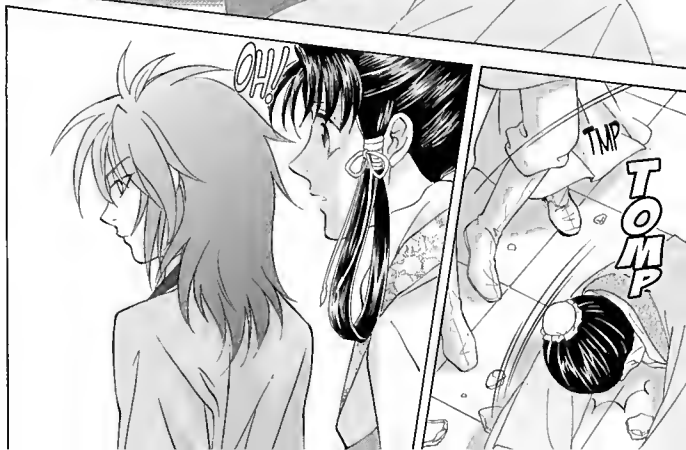
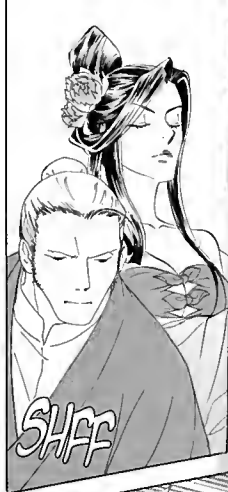
GRIN



THERE'S
NOT A
DECENT
FIGHTER
AMONG
THE LOT
OF YOU.









CONSIDER
IT A
WHIM ON
MY PART.

AND I'M
YOGETSU,
GOT IT?

I'M NOT THAT
PEOPLE-LOVING
EIGETSU, SO IF
YOU THINK I'LL
KEEP COMING
TO YOUR
RESUE,
YOU'RE
MISTAKEN.



TH-THANK
YOU,
EIGETSU.



UGH...



EL...

I MEAN,
YOGETSU...?



ZZZ

ZZZ



TIME'S...
UP...

SHP

OH!



THE ONLY
SIDE I'VE
EVER BEEN
ON IS MY
OWN. IT WAS
YOUR OWN
GULLIBILITY
THAT LED
YOU INTO MY
LITTLE TRAP.



KOCHO...!



BETRAY
HIM?

OUR MASTER
HAS TREATED
YOU SO WELL!
HOW COULD
YOU BETRAY
HIM LIKE
THIS?!



I AM KOCHO OF KOGARO,
ONE OF THE HEADS OF
THE SYNDICATE THAT
RULES THIS ENTIRE
LOWER CITY. HE DARES
TO PAW ME WITH HIS
FILTHY HANDS AND TALK
CONDESCENDINGLY
AS IF I WERE SOME
ORDINARY WOMAN?!

THEN HE
DEMANDS
THAT I TREAT
MY OWN
PRECIOUS
SHURE! LIKE
THIS...?!



YOU
THINK HE
TREATED
ME WELL?

HA! HOW DARE
HE PRESUME
I WISH TO BE
"FREED" FROM
KOGARO TO
LIVE AS HIS
MISTRESS? IT'S A
HUNDRED YEARS
TOO EARLY FOR
HIM TO EVEN
ATTEMPT IT.

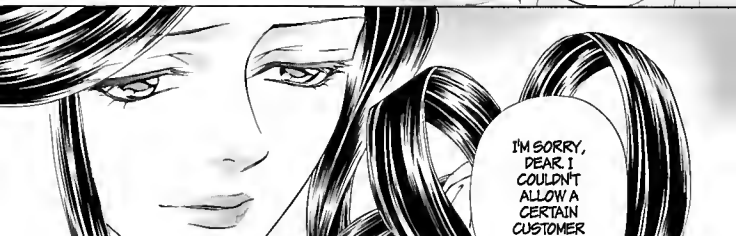




...BUT
WOULD YOU
MIND NOT
COMING
HERE FOR
A WHILE?

I'M
SORRY,
SHUREI...

I DON'T KNOW
WHAT I WOULD
HAVE DONE IF
YOU HAD TRULY
STARTED
HATING ME,
KOCHO...



I'M SORRY,
DEAR. I
COULDN'T
ALLOW A
CERTAIN
CUSTOMER
TO SEE YOU
HERE.

LORD
RAN?

I TRULY
AM
SORRY.

I AGREED
FOR THAT
REASON,
BUT IT
WAS
HARD ON
ME TOO.

LORD RAN
ASKED ME TO
TAKE HIM ON
AS A FAVOR,
SAYING THAT
IT WOULD
EVENTUALLY
BE OF
BENEFIT
TO YOU AT
COURT.



OH NO... AND
HERE I'D
MANAGED NOT
TO CRY EVEN
ONCE UNTIL
NOW!

SO THEN...
THIS WAS ALL
GENERAL
RAN'S...?

NOT EVEN
IN FRONT
OF SEIRAN...

I KNOW,
DEAR
YOU'VE
DONE
WELL

YOU THOUGHT
THAT TO STAND
UP TO FIGHT
MEN, YOU HAD
TO LEARN
NOT TO CRY
IN FRONT OF
THEM EVEN
SEIRAN.

YOU'VE
WORKED SO
HARD. I AM
VERY PROUD
OF YOU,
MY SWEET
DAUGHTER

KOCHO
...



BUT THERE
IS STILL
WORK TO BE
DONE. SO
DRY YOUR
TEARS.

HUH?

IF
CIRCUMSTANCES
WEREN'T AT
SUCH A CRITICAL
POINT RIGHT
NOW, I WOULD
LET YOU CRY THE
WHOLE NIGHT
THROUGH.



THE LITTLE
ONE ENDED
UP BEING
THE MOST
RELIABLE
THIS TIME
AROUND.
HOW
SHAMEFUL.

A PROPER MAN
WOULD COME
RUSHING TO
SAVE THE
WOMAN HE
LOVES WHEN
SHE'S IN
DANGER. THESE
TWO ARE LATE.
HONESTLY!

!

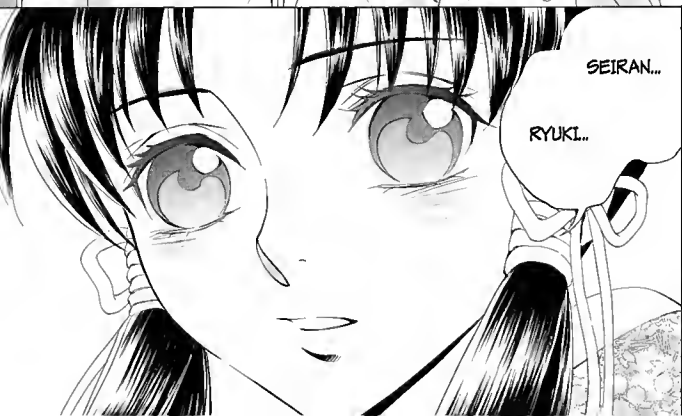


MY
LADY...

OH

SHURE!
ARE YOU ALL
RIGHT?

Have
you been
crying?



SEIRAN...

RYUKI...

...AND THEY
WANT ME
DISMISSED
FROM THE
CIVIL
SERVICE?

SO THEY'RE
SAYING I
DIDN'T PASS
THE EXAM
ON MY OWN
MERIT...



WILL MY
SPONSOR BE
ALL RIGHT?
YOU SAID THEY
ARRESTED HIM
AND PUT HIM
IN CONFINEMENT...?!

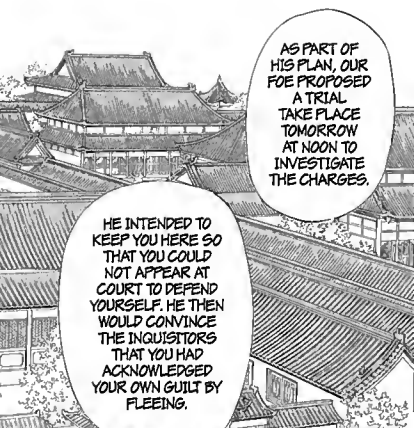
Ah

YES. THEY
ARE ACCUSING
YOUR SPONSOR
OF CURRYING
FAVOR
UNLAWFULLY ON
YOUR BEHALF
SO THAT YOU
WOULD PASS
THE EXAM WITH
A HIGH RANK

OH... I
SEE.

INDEED. THIS
PARTICULAR
MAN WON'T
SIT QUIETLY
AND ALLOW
HIS ARREST
TO CONTINUE
LONG.

BELIEVE
US, HE
WILL BE
PERFECTLY
FINE.



AS PART OF
HIS PLAN, OUR
FOE PROPOSED
A TRIAL
TAKE PLACE
TOMORROW
AT NOON TO
INVESTIGATE
THE CHARGES.

HE INTENDED TO
KEEP YOU HERE SO
THAT YOU COULD
NOT APPEAR AT
COURT TO DEFEND
YOURSELF. HE THEN
WOULD CONVINCE
THE INQUISITORS
THAT YOU HAD
ACKNOWLEDGED
YOUR OWN GUILT BY
FLEEING.



MORE
IMPORTANTLY
...



FOR THAT
ALONE,
HE WOULD
TAKE SUCH
COWARDLY
ACTIONS...?!

ALL THIS
BECAUSE
HE DOESN'T
LIKE THE
IDEA OF
WOMEN
BEING CIVIL
SERVANTS?!

WHAT?!



I ACCEPT
THEIR
CHALLENGE!

I WILL GO TO
THE TRIAL
TOMORROW
AND PROVE
I HAVE THE
QUALIFICATIONS
OF MY RANK.

I SHALL
NEVER
FORGIVE
HIM!



THIS WILL BE
THE PERFECT
OPPORTUNITY
TO SHOW
EVERYONE
THE MERIT OF
ALLOWING
FEMALE CIVIL
SERVANTS IN
COURT!

EXACTLY.
WE WILL
USE THEIR
PLOY
AGAINST
THEM



I WOULD
HAVE
INSISTED
EVEN IF
YOU HADN'T
SUGGESTED
IT, MY
LIEGE.

KOCHO.



FOR TONIGHT,
THOUGH, WE
THINK IT WOULD
BE BEST IF YOU
STAYED HERE
AT KOGARU
WITH SEIRAN
AND EIGETSU.

THEY'LL
BE
ABLE TO
PROTECT
YOU HERE.



LEAVE THE
LOWER CITY
TO US.
THEY SHALL
GET THE
MESSAGE.

I MUST IMPRESS
UPON THESE
RUFFIANS HOW
WOEFULLY FOOLISH
THEY ARE TO DARE
TO ATTACK MY
SWEET DAUGHTER.

OH

BUT AS
A WAY TO
GATHER
EVIDENCE,
WE DON'T
WANT TO
DETER
THEM BY
PLACING
AN ARMED
GUARD WITH
YOU.

SHUREI

THERE IS
NO DOUBT
YOU WILL BE
ATTACKED ON
YOUR WAY TO
THE PALACE
TOMORROW.

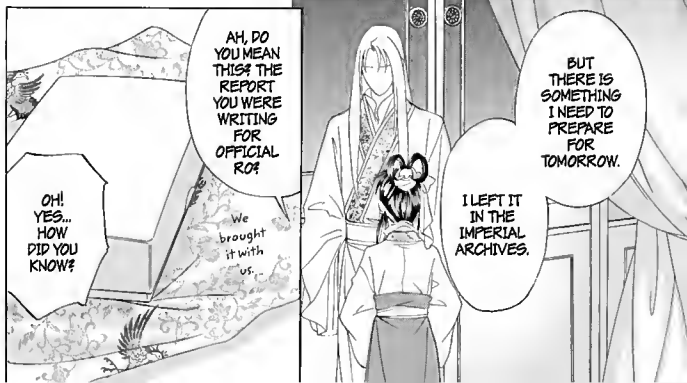
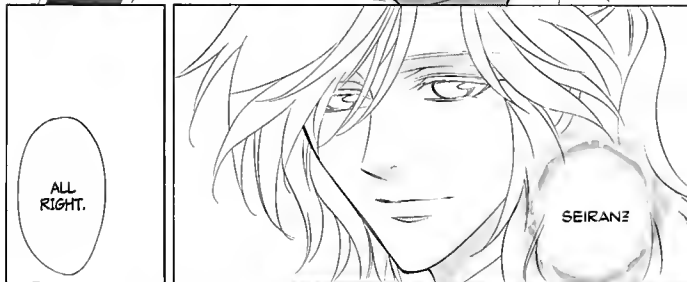
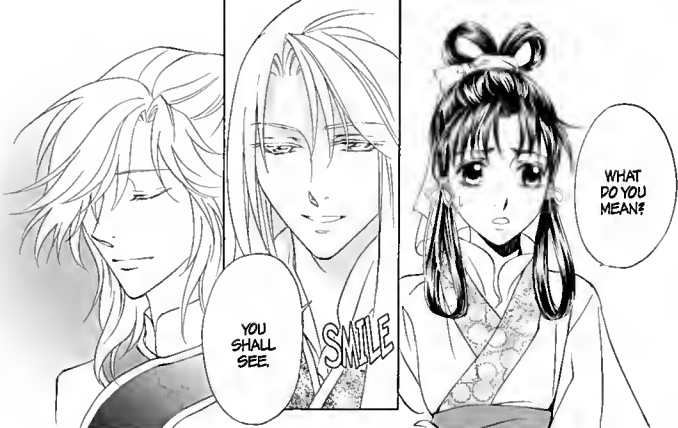
WE WANT
YOU TO
REACH THE
PALACE ON
YOUR OWN
STRENGTH.

HEH

I'M NOT
VERY
STRONG,
THOUGH...

AS HE IS
NOW, THERE
IS NO FOE
THAT SEIRAN
WILL HAVE TO
STAND DOWN
AGAINST.

THAT
IS WHY
WE ARE
LEAVING
SEIRAN
WITH YOU.





THE
CUSTOMER
GENERAL
RAN
REQUESTED
KOCHO TO
TAKE...

THIS REPORT
WILL BE THE
PERFECT
PROOF
OF THIS
OFFICIAL'S
CORRUPTION.

WE WERE
QUITE
SURPRISED
WHEN WE
FOUND IT.

WE WERE
ALREADY
HAVING
SOMEONE
INVESTIGATE
THE SAME
THING DUE TO
A CERTAIN
INCIDENT.

THE
OFFICIAL IN
QUESTION
IS ALSO
BEHIND
THIS TRIAL.

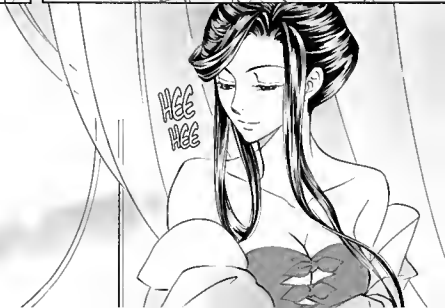
IF YOU CAN
FINISH THAT
REPORT AND
SEND IT TO US
BY TOMORROW
NOON, IT WILL
BE OF GREAT
USE TO US.

CAN
I DO
THIS?

SIMPLY USE
THE SHI
CLAN'S SEAL
IN SEIRAN'S
POSSESSION
TO SEND IT TO
THE COURT...

...AND IT
WILL BE
BROUGHT
TO US WITH
UTMOST
HASTE.

RYUKI...



HUH?

UM...

...USING
ME AS
BAIT?

WERE
YOU...

SILENCE

WE
SUPPOSE
WE WERE...

SORRY.

...HAVEN'T
BEEN
TREATING ME
DELICATELY
SINCE I
BEGAN MY
DUTIES AT
COURT.

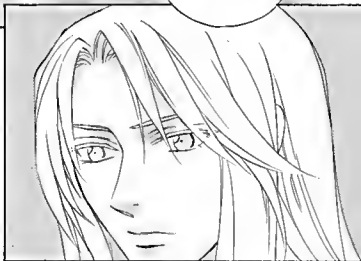
BOTH
YOU AND
MASTER
KOYU,
AND EVEN
GENERAL
RAN...

THANK
YOU.

HUH?

IT'S SO
DIFFERENT
FROM HOW
THINGS
WERE A
YEAR
AGO.

YOU TOLD ME
HONESTLY
THAT MY
LIFE WAS IN
DANGER, AND
THAT YOU
USED ME TO
LURE OUT AN
ENEMY.



LAST YEAR
YOU WOULDN'T
SAY WHAT
WAS GOING ON
EVEN WHEN
ROBBERS
WERE
INVADING
THE CITY.

JUST LIKE A
PRINCESS IN
A TOWER, MY
IGNORANCE
WAS
PROTECTED...

...SO THAT
I COULD GO
ON SMILING
INNOCENTLY
WITHOUT A
CARE IN THE
WORLD.

I WANT
TO BE A
SHELTER
TO THOSE
I LOVE.

...SO I
COULD
PROTECT
OTHERS,
RATHER
THAN
REMAINING
PROTECTED
MYSELF.

I WANTED
TO BECOME
A CIVIL
SERVANT
...

BUT IT'S
DIFFERENT
NOW, AND
I'M GLAD
ABOUT IT.



SHUREI...

AND...
THANK
YOU FOR
COMING
TO SAVE
ME AS
WELL.



THANK YOU
FOR TREATING
ME AS AN
OFFICIAL
IN YOUR
GOVERNMENT.



SO
PLEASE
DON'T
LIE.



ALLOW ME
TO ASK YOU
ONE THING.
I'LL NEVER
ASK IT
AGAIN...



THERE
WAS
NONE.



CAN I
TRULY
HOLD MY
HEAD HIGH
AS A CIVIL
SERVANT?

WAS THERE
TRULY NO
FAVORITISM
BEHIND MY
RANK ON
THE EXAM?



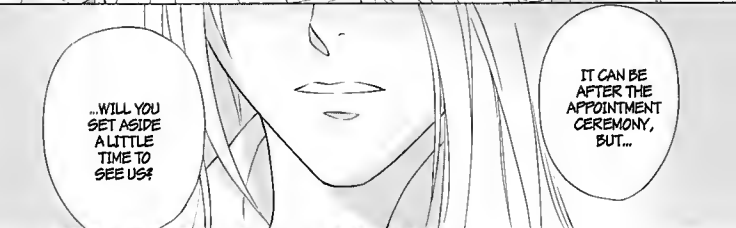
THEN
THERE IS
NOTHING
FOR ME
TO FEAR.



WHAT
IS IT?

WE HAVE A
REQUEST
AS WELL...
WON'T YOU
HEAR IT?

SHUREI



...WILL YOU
SET ASIDE
A LITTLE
TIME TO
SEE US?

IT CAN BE
AFTER THE
APPOINTMENT
CEREMONY,
BUT...



HUH?

That's
your
request?



RYUKI?



THEN
WHEN
THERE'S
SOME
TIME...

...HE
DIDN'T
LOOK
LIKE
HIMSELF.

FOR A
MOMENT
THERE...

YES.



"HALF THE
CITY HAS
GROUND TO
A HALT THIS
AFTERNOON."

"IF YOU DO
NOT RETURN
IMMEDIATELY,
I'LL KILL
YOU!"

JOY



YOUR
HIGH-
NESS.

A
MESSAGE
HAS
ARRIVED
FOR YOU...



WE...
DON'T
WANT TO
GO BACK
TONIGHT...

WRITTEN
BY LORD
KOYU.



Umm...

UM...
WE'RE
BACK...



GET IN
HERE
IMMEDIATELY
AND CLOSE
THAT
DOOR!!

YOU'RE
LATE!!

Y...
YES!

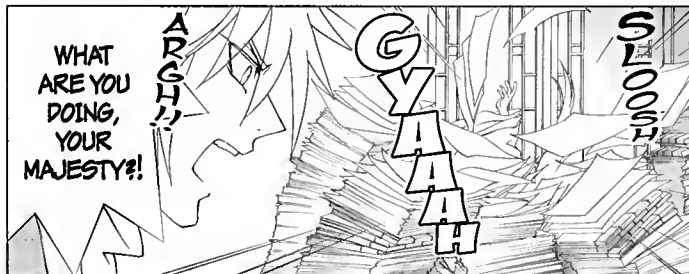


Uh...

TEETER

TEETER

SLAM



WHAT ARE YOU DOING, YOUR MAJESTY?!

ARGH!!

GYAAAH

SLAM



HIGHNESS... ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?

...



YES.

SI GH

WE
BELIEVE
SO...

ARE
THESE ALL
PETITIONS
FOR AID?

AFTER LORD
REISHIN WAS
PLACED UNDER
ARREST,
EVERY MEMBER
OF THE HONG
CLAN IN KIYO
IMMEDIATELY
WENT ON
STRIKE.



TO THINK
THEY WOULD
HAVE SO
GREAT AN
IMPACT IN
SO SHORT A
TIME...

BEFORE
LONG,
HALF THE
COMMERCE IN
THE CITY HAD
GROUNDED TO A
DEAD HALT.



YOUR
SUPERIOR
CERTAINLY IS
IMPRESSIVE,
KOYU.

AS A
RESULT, THE
EMPEROR'S
OFFICE HAS
BECOME AN
OCEAN OF
PETITIONS

IT'S BECAUSE
AROUND TOWN,
THE WORDS ON
EVERYONE'S
LIPS ARE,
"SEND YOUR
COMPLAINTS TO
THE PALACE."



EVEN
SO, HE IS
HOLDING
BACK ON
US, YOUR
MAJESTY.

THE SALT,
IRON AND RICE
INDUSTRIES
ARE
THANKFULLY
UNAFFECTED.
HE COULD
HAVE DONE
WORSE.



NO, THIS IS
LORD KURO'S
DOING. HE
WIELDS
A GREAT
AMOUNT OF
POWER IN
THE HONG
CLAN.



WHAT'S
MORE, THE
STRIKES
APPEAR TO
BE LIMITED
TO THE
CAPITAL
ONLY.

HE COULD
HAVE HAD
ALL CIVIL
SERVANTS
BEARING
THE NAME OF
HONG RESIGN
IMMEDIATELY,
BUT HE DID
NOT.

AND HE
UPHOLDS
THE PRIDE
OF THE
CLAN
MORE THAN
ANYONE.

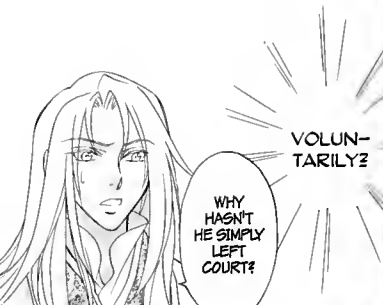


SO THIS
IS THE
POWER OF
THE HONG
CLAN...



WITHOUT
EXAGGERATION,
THE HONG
CLAN COULD
LITERALLY BRING
THE ENTIRE
COUNTRY TO
RUIN IF IT SO
WISHED.

...



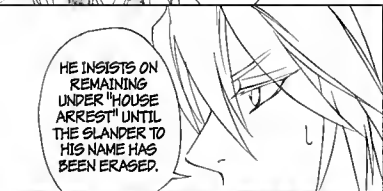
VOLUNTARILY?

WHY
HASN'T
HE SIMPLY
LEFT
COURT?



WHERE IS
MINISTER
HONG
NOW?

HE HAS TAKEN
OVER ONE OF
THE SMALLER
PAVILIONS IN
THE OUTER
COURT AND
PLACED HIMSELF
VOLUNTARILY IN
CONFINEMENT
THERE.



HE INSISTS ON
REMAINING
UNDER "HOUSE
ARREST" UNTIL
THE SLANDER TO
HIS NAME HAS
BEEN ERASED.



HOW MUCH
TROUBLE
AND BOTHER
THAT MAN IS!

SLUMP



IN OTHER
WORDS,
HE'S
BULLYING
YOU!



HOWEVER,
I RATHER
SUSPECT THE
SITUATION
WILL BE
RESOLVED
WITHIN THE
NEXT DAY
OR SO EVEN
WITHOUT MY
CLAN'S HELP.

IF YOU
ORDERED IT,
WE COULD
KEEP THE
COUNTRY
RUNNING
INDEFINITELY.

SHUEI, HOW
MUCH OF THE
CURRENT
STANDSTILL
CAN THE
RAN CLAN
RESOLVE?



WELL, I
DO HAVE
SOME
GOOD
NEWS.

THAT...WAS
RATHER
REMISS OF
OUR FOE...

Not
knowing
this...



FNIIP
FNIIP

Brush!
We
need a
brush!

BY
NOON!

WE SHALL
WRITE AND
ORDER HIM
TO ARRIVE
BY NOON! GET
THIS MESSAGE
TO HIM
POSTHASTE!

FORGIVE
ME,
BUT...

I RECEIVED
A
MESSAGE
FROM
ENSEI
HE SHOULD
ARRIVE
HERE BY
TOMORROW
EVENING.

...I HAVE
ALREADY
WRITTEN
HIM
SAYING
JUST
THAT.

...!

ENSEI
RO!



WHO...

IT WAS
BROUGHT
HERE BY
MASTER
SHOKA..

...WITH
CREDENTIALS
ATTESTING
ITS
AUTHENTI-
CITY.



LASTLY,
I HAVE
THIS.

TUP



No
wonder
we
couldn't
find it.

BY AN ODD
COINCIDENCE
LORD KURO
DID.

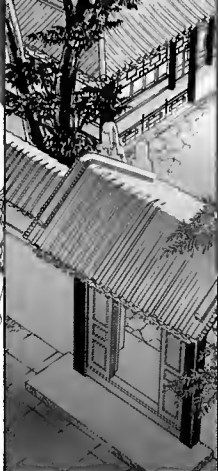
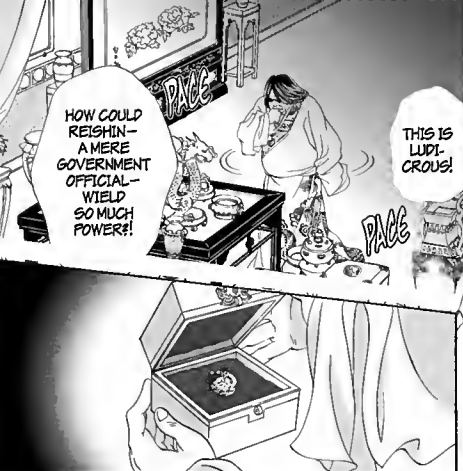


WHO HAD
IT ALL
THIS
TIME?!



THE RING
OF THE
HEAD OF
THE SA
CLAN...

SO THIS
IS THE
REAL
ONE...?



HOW COULD
REISHIN—
A MERE
GOVERNMENT
OFFICIAL—
WIELD
SO MUCH
POWER?!

THIS IS
LUDI-
CROUS!

PACÉ

AS LONG
AS I HAVE
THIS RING,
ALL IS
WELL.

I CAN ALWAYS
PLEAD MY HEALTH
AND LEAVE THE
CAPITAL FOR
CONVALESCENCE.

WELL, AT
LEAST THIS
CATASTROPHE
HASN'T
REACHED
ME YET.

I'LL MAKE
SURE SHE
DOESN'T
REACH
THE TRIAL
IN TIME!

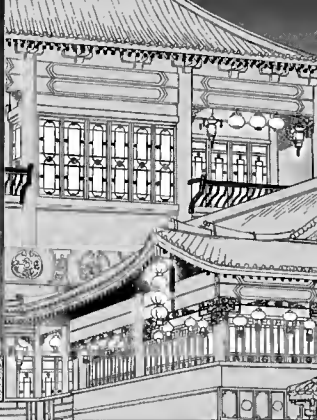
THAT
WRETCHED
GIRL! BUT
I'LL BE RID
OF HER
TOMORROW.

JINK



KNOX
KNOX

MISS
SHUREI?



MISS KOCHO
TOLD ME
EVERYTHING.
PLEASE LET
ME HELP YOU.

Yes...

IT'S
GREAT
TO SEE
YOU AS
EIGETSU
AGAIN.

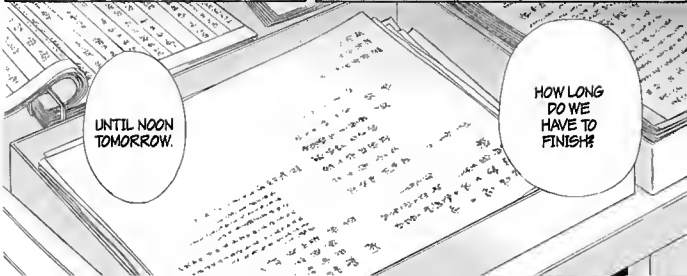
KLATT

YES,
PLEASE
DO.



EIGETSU!

I'M SO
SORRY!
I CAN'T
BELIEVE I
SLEPT FOR
SO LONG.



UNTIL NOON
TOMORROW.

HOW LONG
DO WE
HAVE TO
FINISH?

SAY,
EIGETSU!
WHEN DID
YOU FIRST
START
SUSPECTING
THIS?

YES...

AHH IT'S
GOING TO BE
CLOSE.

YES. BUT
IT TOOK ME
LONGER TO
REALIZE.

I HEARD
VARIOUS
RUMORS
WHILE
I WAS
SHINING
SHOES.

IT WAS
THE
SAME
FOR YOU,
WASN'T
IT?

IT'S THE
LETTER
THAT CAME
FOR ME BY
COURIER
THIS
MORNING.

PLEASE
READ THIS.

TO BE
HONEST,
SOMEONE
GAVE ME
SOME
PRIOR
WARNING.

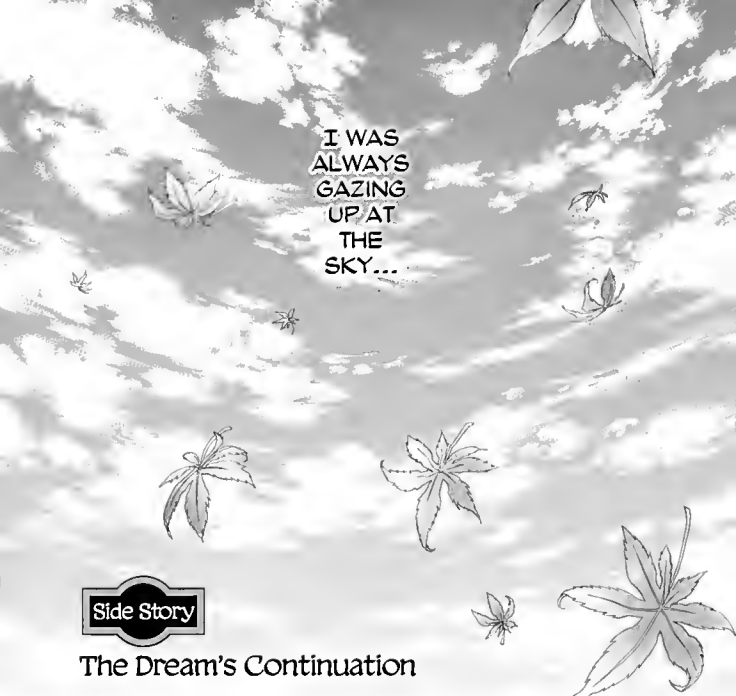
WHO?



TEP *TEP*



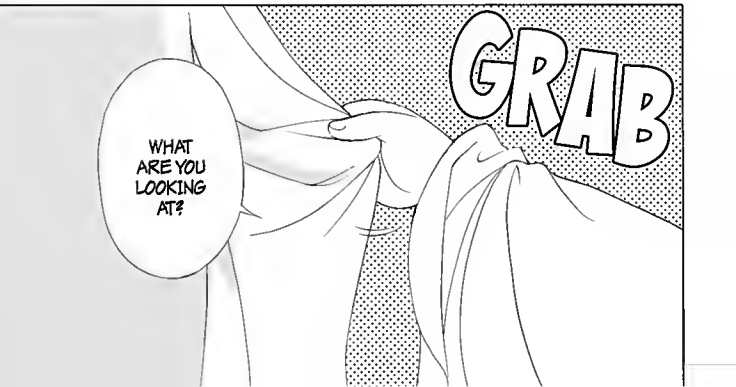
The Story of
SAIUNKOKU



I WAS
ALWAYS
GAZING
UP AT
THE
SKY...

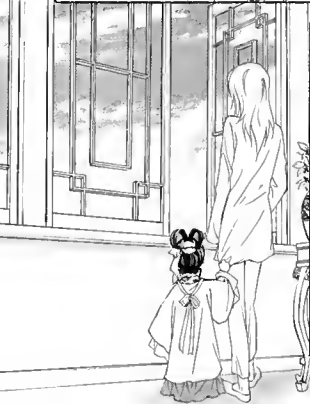
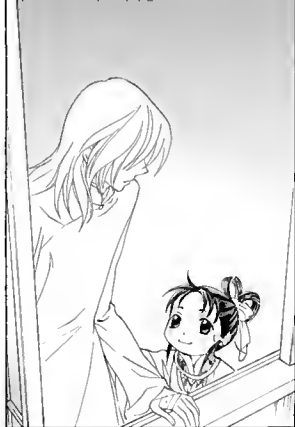
Side Story

The Dream's Continuation



WHAT
ARE YOU
LOOKING
AT?

GRAB

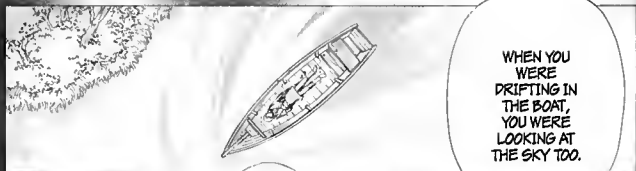




YOU LIKE
THE
SKY,
HUH?



ARE YOU
LOOKING
AT THE
SKY?



WHEN YOU
WERE
DRIFTING IN
THE BOAT,
YOU WERE
LOOKING AT
THE SKY TOO.



YOU HAD
A LITTLE
BAG IN ONE
HAND AND
YOU LAY
THERE...

...JUST
LOOKING
AND
LOOKING AT
THE SKY.



BUT I
WASN'T
ALLOWED
TO DIE
THERE
WHILE
GAZING
UP AT THE
SKY...



I
REMEMBER...

I WAS
THINKING I
WOULDN'T
MIND IF
I DIED
THERE.



DO YOU
REMEMBER?



PLEASE
LET ME
DIE.



PLEASE
HELP ME
DIE.

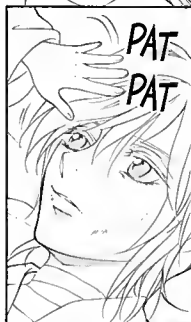
BECAUSE I
COULDN'T
KILL
MYSELF.

Just look
at these
scrawny
cheeks.

WE'RE
GOING TO
NURSE YOU
BACK TO
PERFECT
HEALTH, SO
PREPARE
YOURSELF!

OH! WELL,
UNFORTUNATELY
FOR YOU,
I DELIGHT
IN DOING
PRECISELY THE
OPPOSITE OF
WHAT PEOPLE
WANT.

P R O M P



PAT
PAT



SUFF



BECAUSE
THIS ISN'T
THE SORT
OF PLACE
A PERSON
LIKE ME
SHOULD
BE.

ONCE
I AM
ABLE,
I WILL
LEAVE
HERE.



S M I L E



WINTER
IS
ALMOST
HERE.

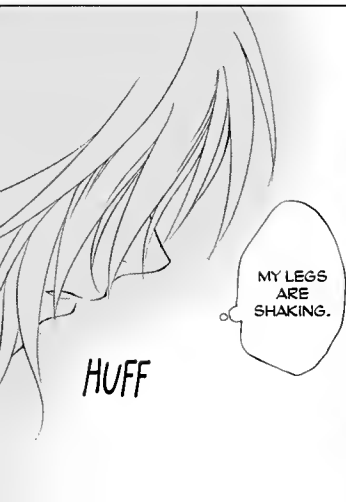
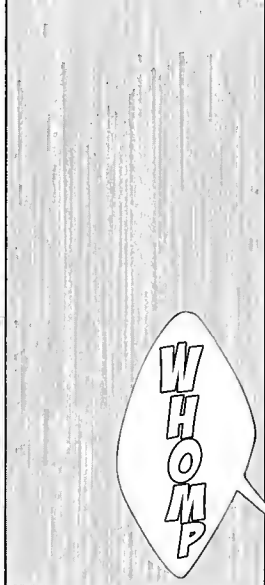
THAT
COLD,
BITTER
WINTER...



A LITTLE
PAIN LIKE
THIS
SHOULD BE
NOTHING...

I'VE
GROWN
SOFT.

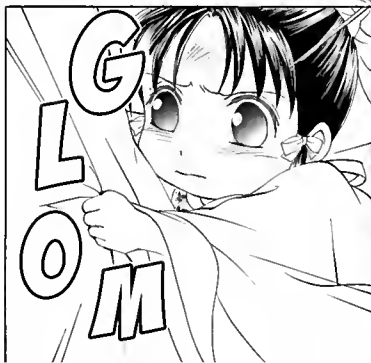
SOFT





I DON'T
WANT HER
TO CRY.

IT
REMINDS
ME TOO
MUCH OF
HIM...







AND YOU
HAVEN'T
SAID
ANYTHING!

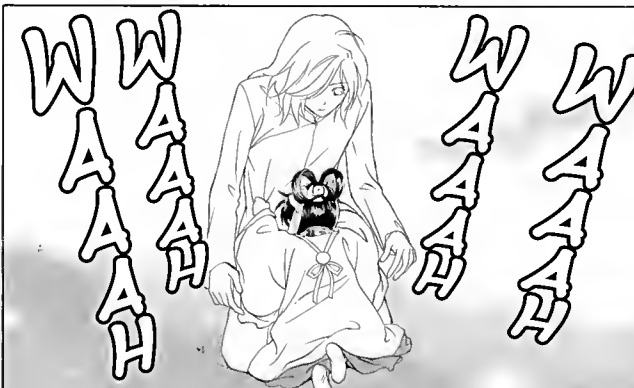
YOU CAN'T
GO! YOUR
FACE IS
STILL LIKE
A GHOST'S!

AND YOU
STILL
HAVEN'T
SMILED
EVEN
ONCE!

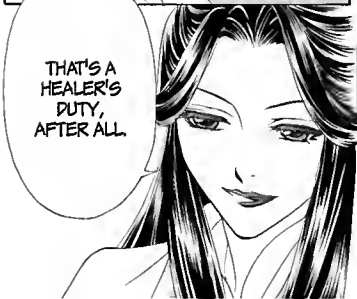
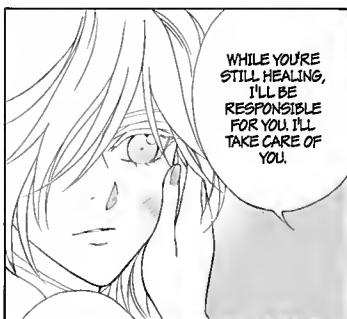
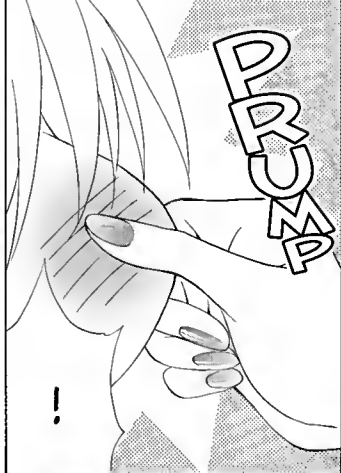
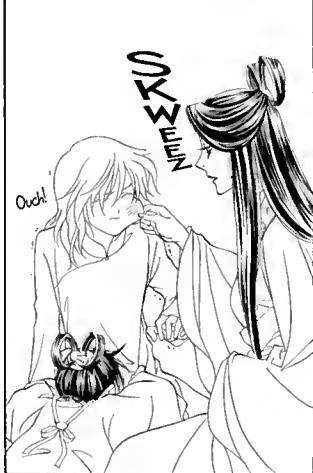


SOB

SO...
YOU
CAN'T
GO...



W
A
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AH, I KNOW.
PERHAPS WE
SHOULD GIVE YOU A
NAME. THEN YOU'LL
HAVE NO CHOICE
BUT TO JOIN OUR
FAMILY.



UNTIL
THAT
HEART OF
YOURS
HEALS...

SO
PREPARE
YOURSELF,
MY BOY!



Thief's
Code?
Since when
were you a
thief...?

AFTER ALL,
IF YOU WRITE
YOUR NAME ON
SOMETHING, IT
BECOMES YOUR
OWN! THAT'S
THE THIEF'S
CODE, ANYWAY.

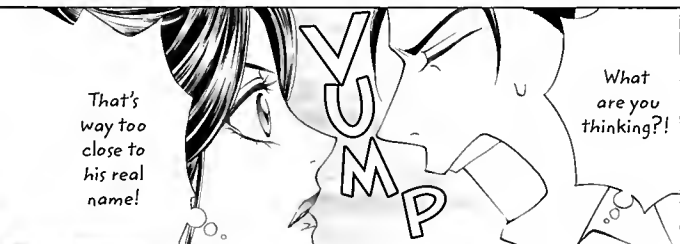
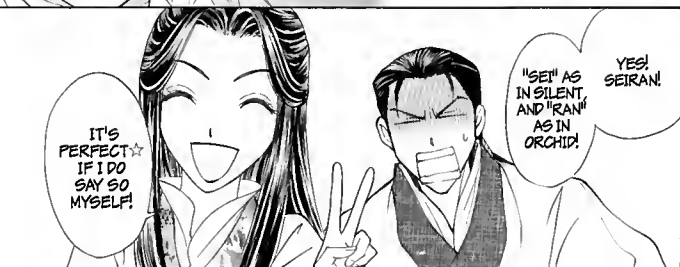
EXCELLENT
IDEA!



HIS
REAL
NAME IS
SEIEN,
IF I
RECALL.

AND HIS
DECEASED
MOTHER'S
NICKNAME
WAS
SUZURAN,
SO...

NOW
THEN...





SHI...

SH...
SH...

HUH? ME?
PICK A
SURNAME?

DO I
HAVE
TO?

MRRR

QUIT
YOUR
YAMMERING!

IT'S
PERFECT!
SO YOU
JUST PICK
A SURNAME
FOR HIM



You're the
fool, Fool!

WHAT
DO YOU
THINK OF
"SEIRAN
SHI"?



WELL,
THERE'S
NO HELPING
IT. WE'VE
ALREADY
SAID IT.

I-it's your
fault for
putting me on
the spot!

☆

HISS

☆

Don't turn
this on me,
you hope-
less man!

PST

PST

☆

☆

"Seien Shi" and
"Seiran Shi"?! That
surname is the same!
If he ever goes back
to the palace, he'll
be discovered in
a heartbeat; you
squinty-eyed loon!

☆

HISS

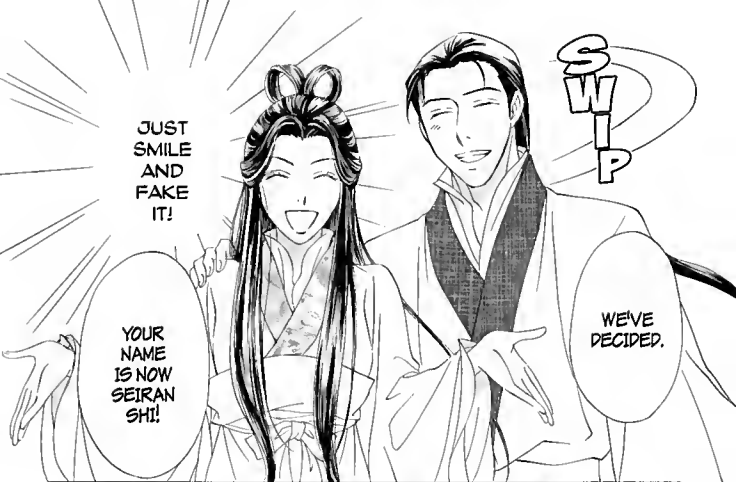
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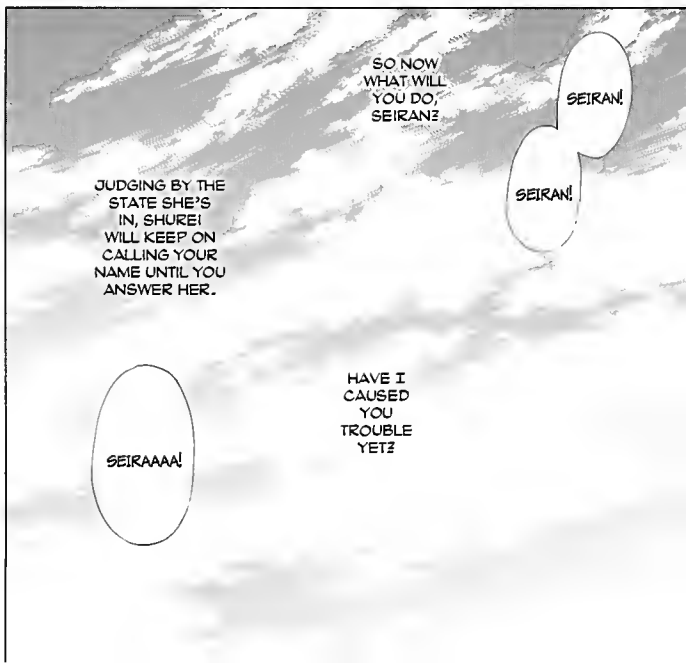
PST

PST

☆

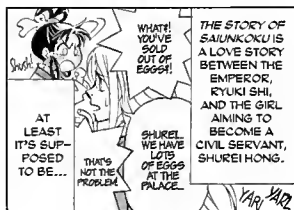
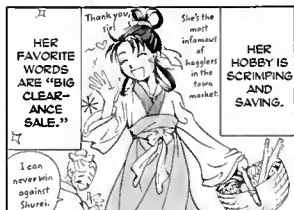
☆





The Story of
SAIUNKOKU

Bargain Hunter Girl



The Story of SAIUNKOKU

Four-Panel Comics



Presented by Kairi Yura!

Kairi Yura



Man of Mystery

The Boy Who Was Fourth

AN
ODDBALL
SAID
TO BE
GIFTED
WITH
GODLY
GENIUS.

RYUREN
RAN,
FOURTH
SON OF
THE RAN
CLAN

A
BRILLIANT
BOY
OFTEN
CALLED
THE
"PRODIGY
OF HEKI
PROVINCE."

HAKUMEI
HEKI,
ELDEST
SON OF
THE
HEKI
CLAN

Headshot
used in
Anaka.

HE IS
CURRENTLY
TOURING
VARIOUS
PROVINCES
AS A
VAGRANT.

SEEKING
FREEDOM,
HE TOOK
THE
IMPERIAL
EXAM THEN
SNUCK
AWAY,
FLOUTING
HIS DUTIES.

WHY?!

HOW-
EVER
...

1st Place, Jogen: Eigetsu Toh
2nd Place, Jogen: Ryuren Ran
3rd Place, Tanko: Shurei Hong
Runner Up: 4th Place,
Hakumei Heiki

IF YOU
KEEP
GETTING
ANGRY,
YOU'LL GO
BALD, YOU
KNOW?

HIS
ACTIONS
SUGGEST
AN UTTER
LACK OF
COMMON
SENSE.
THUS
HE
TURNS
UP IN
RANDOM
PLACES.

PLEASE
LOOK
FORWARD
TO IT.

LIKE I
WOULD
TAKE
ADVICE
FROM THE
LIKES OF
YOU!

And quit
invading
my personal
space!

GET LESS
PANEL TIME
THAN A
BUNCH OF
OLD
GUYS!

WHY
INDEED?

THIS IS
A SHOUJO
MANGA!
SO WHY
DOES A
BEAUTIFUL
BLOND BOY
LIKE ME...

COULD A
MANGA
STARRING
THESE
TWO EVER
WORK?

Kairi Yura was born on January 16. She is the illustrator of both the manga and the YA novels for *The Story of Saiunkoku*. She is also the creator of the *Angelique* series. Yura's hobby is going to the theater.

Sai Yukino was born on January 26. She is author of both the manga and the YA novels for *The Story of Saiunkoku*. She received an honorable mention and the Readers' Award for Kadokawa's Beans Novel Taisho Awards. When she's not busy writing, Yukino enjoys massages.

THE STORY OF SAIUNKOKU

Volume 7

Shojo Beat Edition

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